

Studied murder

Unintimidated by US pressure to throttle a UN report on the Qana massacre, Secretary-General Boutros Ghali released the report implicating Israel in the premeditated massacre of women and children

Egypt-Jordan summit talks

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak and King Hussein of Jordan met yesterday to discuss bilateral relations and the latest developments in the Middle East peace process. The king was on a one-day visit to Cairo.

The meeting was the first between Mubarak and Hussein since Israel's aggression on Lebanon. The two leaders were expected to make preparations for a three-way summit grouping them with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat in Cairo next week.

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri joined his Jordanian counterpart, Abdel-Karim Al-Kabarti, in Amman to participate in the 13th meeting of the Egyptian-Jordanian Supreme Committee.

Nafie walkout

IBRAHIM Nafie, the chairman of the Press Syndicate, yesterday walked out of a meeting of the Shura Council committee charged with drafting a new press law to replace the controversial Law 93 approved by parliament last year.

Nafie withdrew from the meeting after it turned down his demand to amend an article in the draft law stating that a member of the Supreme Press Council must attend the meetings of the press syndicate's disciplinary committee. Nafie insisted the committee should be limited to syndicate members. Nafie also opposed articles providing for imprisonment as a punishment for libel and said it should be limited to the payment of a fine. (see p. 2)

Urgent appeal

THE UNION of Arab Journalists' General Secretariat called on Algerian President Lamine Zeroual to use his presidential powers to release the Algerian journalist Al-Hag ben Nouman.

A reporter for the Algerian Press Agency, Nouman has been jailed since 27 February 1994. He was accused of threatening national security by divulging news of the relocation of a detained leader of the Islamic Salvation Front from Algiers to an outpost in the desert.

The secretariat sent an urgent call for Nouman's release, stating that he was being punished for doing his job. The call coincided with the celebration of Arab Press Day on 6 May.

PNA calls

ISRAEL'S state telephone company said yesterday that it had cut off overseas calls from the autonomous Palestinian territories due to \$9 million in unpaid bills. Officials at the company said a partial payment of \$1.5 million was promised by the Palestinian telephone authority, Patelco, for 23 April, but was never made.

The Israeli company also cut a broadcasting link between the official Palestinian radio studio in Jericho and a broadcasting station in Ramallah after a \$320,000 payment cheque from the Palestinian Authority bounced. This has not affected radio broadcasts, however, because the Palestinian Broadcasting Authority moved its studios from Jericho to Ramallah.

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A United Nations report released this week on its investigation into the Qana massacre found that Israel's shelling of a UN peacekeeping compound in South Lebanon was unlikely to have been the result of technical errors. While senior UN officials privately admitted that the attack was deliberate, as analysts expected, the report stopped just short of accusing Israel of purposely shelling the UN base.

Israel and the US have reacted angrily to the findings, and accused the UN of endangering the fragile cease-fire between Lebanon and Israel.

Diplomats in New York said Washington had not wanted the UN report to be published as it might lead to demands for action by the Security Council against Israel. Despite pressure, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali published the findings, saying: "Our role is to protect the Blue Berets."

Taking aim at Boutros-Ghali, who commissioned the report, US State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns was quoted by Reuters as saying: "We are disturbed that [he] chose to draw unjustified conclusions about this incident that can only polarise the situation rather than draw practical lessons to prevent its recurrence." Washington has dismissed the findings and supports Israel's explanation. The State Department said the probe did not place enough emphasis on Hezbollah's role.

"If they are seriously interested in dialogue with Israel, Syria, the Palestinians and other members of the Arab bloc should make up their mind and renounce their use of the United Nations as an anti-Israel machine," said Uri Dromi, an Israeli government spokesman, in a statement to AFP.

Israeli Foreign Minister Ehud Barak telephoned Boutros-Ghali to protest the release of the report, saying that it contained "absurd" charges that Israel knowingly attacked a UN compound crammed with civilians.

Israel has denied accusations raised in the report, and insisted it was unaware civilians were in the compound, which was manned by Fijian troops. Instead, Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres has blamed the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for the massacre. "The UN did not inform us that refugees were taking shelter at the position," Peres said.

However, Timor Goksel, UNIFIL's spokesman, said Israel knew very well that civilians were at Qana, reports Zeina Khodr from Beirut. "From the onset of the Israeli military offensive, we announced that more than 6,000 people were staying in our camps throughout southern Lebanon," he said.

Goksel added that the argument on whether or not civilians were at the base is irrelevant because UN positions should not be attacked in any case. "The UN is not involved in the fighting. Unfortunately, some parties cannot accept our unbiased role. This was not the first time Israel targeted us and I'm afraid it won't be the last," he said.

Israel slammed 25 shells into the base at Qana killing 107 civilians — mainly women and children —

who were taking shelter from Israel's air, land and naval attack. More than 500 refugees were in the compound during the 18 April attack.

According to the London-based *Jane's Defence Weekly*, seven of the shells were set to explode seven metres above ground, with the aim of "killing and maiming the highest number of people."

The UN report says that two or three Hezbollah resistance fighters ran into the camp after firing mortars nearby. It also said the Israeli army fired on the base 15 minutes after the resistance attacks. Israel had previously announced that it responded immediately to guerrilla fire and accidentally hit the base. It described the shelling as a "grave error" and blamed it on inaccurate maps and technical errors.

But UN officers here were quoted as saying that such an error was unlikely in light of the accuracy of Israel's military machine. Military experts said Israel's military technology is top notch. "How can Israel blame it on faulty maps when the base has been there for 18 years and has been under constant Israeli surveillance," one official said.

A recently released video film also formed the basis of the preliminary UN report. The amateur video, shot by a UN soldier, showed a pilotless Israeli reconnaissance aircraft (drone) flying close to the Qana base during the shelling. This contradicted Israeli claims that there was no spy plane in the area.

The drone captures live footage and guides missiles to their targets, meaning that Israel should have known the base was full of refugees.

Israeli military officials said the drone was on a different mission in the area and its equipment only allows it to see a very limited area. One official said: "The plane was not observing the compound. It had not shown civilians in the base because of bad weather and the refugees were inside buildings." However, military experts stress that Israelis are both pioneers and market leaders in the field of reconnaissance aircraft.

The UN also questioned the fact that, if Hezbollah was indeed the target, not one of the shells from where it launched its missiles was hit by Israeli gunners.

Only weeks before the Israeli general elections, the video and the release of the UN's investigation report are embarrassing for Peres. His image will be tarnished if the international community accuses him of intentionally killing women and children.

America's influential role in the UN Security Council is likely to avert any action against Israel. But whether or not international criticism can be silenced remains to be seen.

For Lebanon, the UN report is a political victory. The Lebanese Foreign Minister Fares Bweiz told reporters, "We have received the contents of the report and we consider that the degree of [Israel's] responsibility has been belittled." The likelihood of any UN strong action against Israel is remote due to American pressure. The damage, however, is already done. And the martyrs have fallen.



photo: Wouter Deruyter

DANCING IN TIME: The life of painter Tahya Halim dominates the stage at El-Gomhouriya Theatre in an innovative piece of dance theatre directed by Walid Aouni. Before a backdrop comprising projections of her most intimate and powerful paintings, *The Last Interview* follows the life of one of Egypt's most respected and popular twentieth century artists

on a journey that incorporates both her early training in Paris and later journeys to Nubia, before that land vanished beneath the rising waters of Lake Nasser.

The Last Interview is the final part of Aouni's trilogy. Together with *Excavations of Agatha* — an exploration of Egypt through the eyes of four seemingly unlikely witnesses, Agatha

Christie, Rita Hayworth, Maria Callas and Asmahan — and *Cona*, which sees the young Naguib Mahfouz take centre stage, it constitutes the culmination of a very personal reading of the images and forces, both past and present, that make up the consciousness of Egypt's modern history. (see *Nehad Selatha, Landscapes of memory*, p. 11)

MPs charge misspending

The country's family planning programme came under fierce parliamentary fire this week. Dina Ezzat investigates, while Gamal Essam El-Din reports on the debate

The People's Assembly this week sent to the Central Auditing Agency (CAA) an itemised account of how the government spent a USAID grant for population and family planning projects over the last few years, asking it to investigate the alleged misappropriation of LE\$11,000. The investigation was prompted by a query raised by National Democratic Party MP Zakaria Azmi, who asked the minister of health and population for an explanation of "a letter I have from USAID requesting that the Ministry of Health conduct an investigation about the unjustified spending of LE\$11,000 from the grant". Parliament's approval of the account, scheduled for last Monday, has to await the CAA report. This temporarily denies government access to extra US funds to implement new projects.

MPs from the opposition voiced other concerns on the government's financial conduct in the family planning field, with Wafdist Ayman Nour bringing up the much-discussed question of generous financial bonuses paid to official workers in the family planning field. Minister of Health and Population Ismail Sallam replied that incentives were essential to encourage family planning workers to reach out to more people. The minister denied all charges of financial corruption.

Modern family planning was introduced into Egypt in the 1960s. The influx of USAID dollars into the National Family Planning Programme (NFPF) began in 1978, after Egypt and the US signed an agreement by which the donor agency provided the NFPF with funds, contraceptives, technical assistance and training. The agreement stipulated that the Egyptian government, for its part, should allocate funds to the NFPF amounting to no less than 25 per cent of that contributed by USAID. So far, USAID has contributed some \$170 million, a figure constituting about 75 per cent of monies coming into Egyptian family planning from donor agencies, and about 52 per cent of the total investment in family planning.

Commenting on the parliamentary debate, a senior USAID official, who asked his name to be withheld, said: "USAID is not aware of any letter that was sent to any Egyptian official with the purpose of com-

plaining." It was not possible to reconcile this with MP Azmi's assertion about a letter.

Maher Mahran, secretary-general of the National Population Council (NPC) and former minister of the now-defunct Ministry of Population and Family Welfare told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that "this misappropriation of money did not come from the USAID funds". According to Mahran, the money in question was from the Egyptian financial component. Part of this money, around LE\$18,000, was embezzled by an NPC official in 1993. "The NPC referred the matter to the prosecutor's office, which sent the case to a State Security Court," he explained. The other sum, something under LE\$200,000, "the NPC spent to finance family planning research and workshops. Vouchers were sent to USAID requesting reimbursement."

This latter sum is still in dispute. According to current USAID rules, an Egyptian counterpart — like the NPC — can only access USAID funds for family planning projects through reimbursement for activities and research. For this, the Egyptian side has to provide USAID with a fully-detailed itemised bill that goes through a strict auditing system to ensure that the money was spent in accordance with USAID guidelines. "This amount of around LE\$200,000 is still being revised," said a source from the USAID auditing side. The official also denied that USAID money was spent on family planning staff bonuses, because the terms of the aid deal stipulate that the donor does not pay for permanent Egyptian government staff.

The total amount alleged to have been misappropriated constitutes around 20 per cent of LE\$2.5 million annual budget allocated to the NPC from USAID, to help in its work, which is primarily research.

USAID officials say that they are "not aware that any money has been stolen" from the grant, but concede that there have been some cases of budgets being allocated for projects that did not prove worthwhile. However, they praise the NFPF for its success in reducing the fertility rate per woman from 5.28 in 1979 to 3.63 in 1995.

The money dispute has unveiled a disagreement between the NPC and the Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP).

According to one informed source, "It is a battle over the foreign funds." The calls of some MPs to put all the aid money under the direct control of the MOHP highlights this struggle for power, according to the source. Mahran suggested that the campaign aims to undermine the NPC.

The Family Planning Department at the MOHP, however, denies any plans for centralisation and says that the MOHP has plans to coordinate with, and support, concerned NGOs to cover some needs that the government is unable to meet.

During the debate, MPs also took the opportunity to question the quality of the nation's family planning services, with some deputies alleging that oxidised intra-uterine devices (IUDs) were being distributed to family planning clinics. The minister of health rejected these charges. IUDs are the most prevalent method of contraception in Egypt. Currently, 47.9 per cent of married women in their reproductive years use one method of modern or traditional family planning of these women, over 30 per cent use IUDs. The most common brand is the Copper T 380A, which is distributed in Egypt via the USAID mission. A number of gynaecologists told the *Weekly* that for the last four years they have been finding oxidised IUDs in the packages coming from USAID. However, USAID responded that according to the recent findings of the Population Council, the tarnishing on the copper of IUDs does not reduce their shelf life and has no adverse effect on women's health.

Both the NFPF and USAID agree that they believe the IUD is the best method of contraception for Egyptian women since it has a long duration (up to eight years), does not cost much money.

But reproductive health activists charge that pushing the IUD prioritises the demographic rationale over the reproductive health perspective. They say that the side-effects of IUDs, namely excessive bleeding and increased susceptibility to sexually transmitted diseases, are being ignored, and contrast Egypt with Western countries, where IUD use among contraceptive users has dropped to less than five per cent.

(Details of the parliamentary debate, p. 3)



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Medical oasis in Sinai

Sinai's now has its first major military hospital, a unique facility that will extend its services to Sinai inhabitants and foreign tourists as well as the military. **Galal Nassar** tells the story



President Hosni Mubarak this week inaugurated the largest ever military hospital in Sinai, just south of El-Tor, where all patients can gaze at the blue waters of the Gulf of Suez from their rooms.

The 201-bed hospital is the first in a series of military medical facilities planned for selected strategic locations and population centres throughout the country. One, billed as the largest in the Middle East, is being built at kilometre 45 on the Cairo-Ismailia highway. It will be constructed and equipped with US aid, and American medical crews will operate it for three years, during which time they will

train Egyptian medical teams. The hospital will then be turned over to Egypt. Construction is expected to be completed in 1998. Another military hospital is being built at Fayed, about halfway between Ismailia and Suez along the Suez Canal.

The Sinai hospital has a total area of 75,000 square metres. It consists of four major structures — a two-storey main building with four wings to house the patients, two resthouses for doctors and nursing personnel and a hotel to accommodate patients' relatives. The buildings cover a total of 5,200 square metres, while the remaining land has been studded with lawns and trees. There is

also a special helicopter ramp. Maj-Gen. Moqbil El-Shafat, director of the Military Engineering Corps, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*: "This is the first hospital of its kind in Sinai. In the main building, which houses the patients' rooms, the Gulf waters can be seen from all the rooms."

The hospital, officially named the Mubarak International Military Hospital, was built at a cost of LE42 million. Besides military personnel, the hospital will extend emergency medical services to the residents of the South Sinai Governorate, as well as tourists visiting the region. South Sinai Governor Mamdouh El-Zohairy told the *Weekly*

that, specifically, the hospital will serve tourists visiting the resorts of Sharm El-Sheikh, Dahab, St Catherine's and Nuweiba in addition to Ras Sudr, an oil-producing town on the eastern coast of the Gulf of Suez.

In carrying out the hospital project, El-Zohairy said, military authorities had taken into account the mountainous terrain of the peninsula and the vast distances that have to be covered.

"Thus the hospital features a flying first aid service comprising a number of helicopters to transport passengers and offer services at any point," El-Zohairy said. The hospital also has an international telephone service and other tele-

communications facilities such as telex and fax. All its ambulances are fitted with radio facilities.

The hospital is largely computerised and has the most advanced medical equipment. All patients' rooms are air-conditioned and equipped with telephones and TV sets. The hospital has eight intensive care units, three large operating theatres, one small operating theatre, as well as nine out-patient clinics.

At the inauguration ceremony, Defence Minister Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi told Mubarak that in all, 11 military hospitals are currently under construction.

Secret debate worries journalists

A Shura Council committee has begun discussing the new draft press law, but journalists are worried about the outcome. **Mona El-Nahhas** reports

An amended press law is currently under scrutiny in the Shura Council's Legislative Committee, but the decision to have the discussions behind closed doors has left journalists worried and sceptical.

The new draft is intended to replace Law 93 of 1995, which infuriated journalists and touched off a controversy that led to counter-action by the Press Syndicate, followed by government measures to redress journalists' grievances, centring on what journalists perceive as the restrictive nature of the legislation.

Presidential intervention was a key factor in the process. President Hosni Mubarak ordered the formation of a special committee to prepare a draft for a new law. The committee consisted of public figures, journalists and legal experts. The draft, along with recommendations for modifications by the Press Syndicate, went to the Shura Council last month. The council referred the draft measure and the syndicate's proposed amendments to its Legislative Committee to come up with a final draft. But the committee's decision last Sunday to hold debates in camera worried most journalists.

However, members of the committee assert that journalists have no reason to be uneasy. "We've nothing against journalists. All of us respect press freedom, and will do the best we can to formulate a balanced draft," insisted Shura Council member Ahmed Salama. He added: "It's preferable to keep discussions confidential in order not to incite public debate while the draft is still in the preparatory stage." The committee would make a full announcement when it had completed the final draft, he promised.

A reliable source at the committee, who asked that his name be withheld, has revealed a split between committee members on the question of articles related to the dismissal

of journalists, with several members insisting that the opinion of the Press Syndicate in this matter should not be binding, and that the publishing house should have the final say. The committee debate is expected to end on 25 May. The committee will send its final draft back to the Shura Council for further discussion. The draft will then go to the People's Assembly to be enacted.

Within the next few days, the Press Syndicate's council will hold a meeting to follow up the latest developments and decide what steps to take to guarantee that the amendments it seeks will be included in the new draft.

Former Press Syndicate chairman Kamel Zoheiri said that the current stage was crucial, "requiring all of us to be cautious and vigilant, until the draft reaches its final stage". He criticised the syndicate for not coordinating with journalists who are also Shura Council members. "This would guarantee that the draft was kept safe during closed discussions and that our recommendations would be taken into consideration," he argued.

Leftist syndicate member Salah Eissa, who strongly opposes the new draft, describing it as Law 93 in another guise, is not optimistic. "I don't think the outcome will be in our favour," he said. "Most of our recommendations will be rejected, especially the suggestion of cancelling the imprisonment penalty. The general trend among committee members, most of whom are pro-government, is to lower even the minimum standard [of journalists' rights] we reached in the draft, believing that it's more than we deserve. They think that journalists want to take everything and offer nothing in return."

Adel Hussein, an Islamist writer, also expressed disquiet about the outcome of the committee's debate. Hussein hopes that the "intelligent and broad-minded elements in the government will avoid repeating the old mistake, and will end this prolonged crisis".

Magdi Mehana, a member of the Press Syndicate Council, asserted that the council's efforts would not stop until journalists obtained a "civilised" draft. He added that the General Assembly of the Press Syndicate would re-convene on 19 May or as soon as the Shura Council concluded its debate.

The new draft reverses a provision in Law 93 authorising prosecutors to take journalists into custody while they are under investigation for a publication offence. It also gives the judge, in most cases, the option of punishing an offending journalist either by imprisonment or a fine. Under Law 93, many publication offences are punishable by both.

Old party torn by succession struggle

The general congress of a divided Wafd Party, originally slated to meet today but delayed until an unspecified date later this month, is expected to witness a stormy session marked by a tug-of-war between two factions vying for supremacy. During the session, the congress will elect members of the supreme committee, the body responsible for making major policy decisions. According to the party statutes, 40 members are elected to the committee and another 10 are appointed by Fouad Serageddin, the party leader. It has become an open secret that some of the conference's 1,200 members will demand the cancellation of the post of deputy leader.

Like most opposition political parties in Egypt, the Wafd is ridden with internal disputes. Dissension usually rises to fever pitch just before the party's general congress convenes. The main contest is between Yassin Serageddin, the party leader's younger brother, and No'man Gomaa, the party's deputy leader. The two are competing for the leadership of the party after the retirement or demise of the elderly Serageddin, who is 85. Fouad Serageddin called for the congress meeting after returning to work from a long sick leave. The timing of the session gave rise to speculation among party members that Fouad Serageddin might announce his retirement from party leadership.

Wafd members are divided into two camps: supporters of the younger Serageddin, who heads the party's parliamentary bloc, and those who favour No'man Gomaa. Serageddin's followers are seeking to abolish the post of deputy leader, held by Gomaa since 1989.

Talking to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Serageddin admits his lobby's intentions. "A large number of the members, many being influential, will request the cancellation of the deputy leader's position," Serageddin added that this was the case before the 1952 Revolution, when the secretary-general was the heir apparent to the party's leadership. "Things should go back to what is proper," he said.

Under present party statutes, if the position of party leader becomes vacant, the deputy leader would automatically take over the post

The general congress of the Wafd Party is meeting this month amid differences between factions supporting rival contenders for status of heir-apparent of aged party leader Fouad Serageddin. **Shaden Shehab** investigates

until the general congress meets within 60 days to elect a new leader. Serageddin and his supporters are probably right in fearing that 60 days would be sufficient time for Gomaa to ensure his election as party leader once the congress is held.

Ibrahim Dessouqi Abeza, Wafd assistant secretary-general, told the *Weekly* that rumours are usually rife before a general party congress. He insisted, however, "it is ridiculous to assume that such a high-ranking position [as the post of deputy leader] will be cancelled," he said.

Abeza said that "debates and different points of view within the party are a sign of health; they show that there is democracy and that the party is alive."

Abeza predicted that "new blood" will be injected into the supreme committee, "mostly that of businessmen and experts in all fields who have kept a low profile in the past."

Asked who he expects to be Fouad Serageddin's successor, Yassin Serageddin said that he will not accept anyone outside the Serageddin family, "It is for the benefit of the party; after all, we are the founders."

The younger Serageddin and Gomaa have little in common. Gomaa is known for his strong opposition to the government and his good connections with other members of the party, while Serageddin has the advantage of the family name and being one of the party founders. However his critics claim that he is not popular within party ranks and is sometimes resented for his frequent pro-government stands and connections.

This became evident recently when Serageddin voted in favour of the government's policy statement in parliament while Fouad Badrawi and Ayman Nour, other Wafdist members, voted against it. "It is not a matter of being pro-government or anti-government. I express the Wafdist ideas that do not oppose for the sake of opposition," Yassin Serageddin said in his own defence.

But according to Mona Qorashi, a prominent Wafd member who was expelled last November for running for parliament against the party's will, "Gomaa's lobby within the party is much stronger than Serageddin's. Gomaa is fair; he does not use his position to serve his own interest. He criticises the government only when needed."

Qorashi has filed a lawsuit to contest her expulsion from party ranks. "I was expelled by a decision from the party leader, which is against the party's statutes since two-thirds of the higher committee have to agree to it." She added, however, that "I will not go to a place in which I'm not welcome."

The Wafd Party, a staunch advocate of political and economic liberalism, occupied the centre stage of domestic politics between 1919 and 1952. Suppressed — along with other opposition parties — for a quarter of a century by post-revolutionary governments, the Wafd staged a comeback in 1978 after the nation reverted to the multi-party system.

Late President Anwar El-Sadat seemed to have second thoughts a few months later, issuing a decree prohibiting those who had held high positions before the revolution from political party membership. The decree appeared to be directed personally against Wafd leader Fouad Serageddin and then Secretary-General Ibrahim Farag. In reaction, the Wafd decided to "freeze" its activities. Serageddin and many other prominent figures were jailed by Sadat one month before his assassination by President Hosni Mubarak. Two years later, the Wafd staged a comeback but never regained the wide popularity it enjoyed before 1952.

deal with the militants and would be unlikely to discuss El-Zayyat's proposal. "The cabinet has not discussed this initiative and there was no mention of it in the interior minister's report which was discussed during the cabinet meeting this week," said El-Sherif. "I don't think this is an issue that the cabinet will discuss."

The militant initiative came shortly after the Gama'a claimed responsibility for the killing of 18 Greek tourists in Cairo, and two senior officers in a police ambush two weeks ago in El-Ashmunien, north of Malawi in El-Minya governorate. It also follows government crackdowns on Gama'a's strongholds in the southern provinces of El-Minya and Assiut.

El-Zayyat maintains that support for the initiative has been gaining ground among the younger generation of militants. However, he remained uncertain of the prospects of approval from the groups' leaders. "We have not received a response from the leaders of the Jihad or Gama'a as yet," he said earlier this week. "I can only hope they respond positively."

El-Zayyat said that he was not permitted to do so. A security source, who asked that his name be withheld, described the initiative as "another hoax" which should not be taken seriously. "They have lost the battle after the success of recent government clampdowns, so they are seeking an honourable end to their dirty war by suggesting a one-sided initiative to rescue what they can from the situation," the source said.

And Information Minister El-Sherif insisted that the government was not considering any

The interior minister shrugged off an initiative proposed by Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya's lawyer to suspend militant violence for one year, saying that a dialogue could not be conducted with 'criminals', reports **Omayma Abdel-Latif**

Gama'a Al-Islamiya in Aswan, currently serving a 15-year sentence for attacking two officers guarding a church in Aswan in 1993, proposed a one-year halt in the campaign of violence. Ibrahim said that his faction was willing to give up the armed struggle and made a plea for all Gama'a members "to respond positively to this call."

El-Zayyat claims that a truce would allow moderate elements within the Islamist movement a chance to have the upper hand over the proponents of violence. "For the sake of the stability and security of the country and the people," However, he is still waiting for approval for the initiative from the Gama'a and Jihad leaderships.

He stressed that the initiative was not, at this stage, an attempt to bring the government to the negotiating table. "This is a one-sided initiative on the part of the Islamist groups. We are not asking the government to do anything. The gov-

ernment cannot be party to such an initiative. We tried to involve it in the past but our attempts were doomed to failure," El-Zayyat told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

According to El-Zayyat, Khaled Ibrahim had intended to deliver a statement renouncing violence and calling on other groups to join a peace pact at Sunday's court session ending the case for which he is now serving a jail sentence. However, he claims that he was not permitted to do so.

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Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

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It was a turbulent week in parliament as ruling NDP and opposition members opened heavy fire on alleged corruption. Gamal Essam El-Din attended

Storm over family planning funds

For the second time during its ongoing parliamentary session, the People's Assembly this week referred the third stage of a \$190-million United States Agency for International Development (USAID) family planning grant to the Central Auditing Agency for investigation. Under scrutiny by both the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) and opposition MPs is the alleged misappropriation of funds, and, at the top of their list was the Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP) and former Minister of Population, Maher Mahrouf, now chairman of the National Population Council (NPC).

The NPC is one of three agencies charged with implementing this project which aims at reducing the country's population growth rate to 1.8 per cent per year and the fertility rate to 2.7 per cent by the year 2007 by increasing the efficiency of family planning methods and improving birth control services in rural areas and cities. The other two agencies are the Ministry of Health and Population and the Ministry of Information.

The issue this time was sparked off by the fact that the grant agreement was sent to the Assembly for approval to increase the bud-

get of the third stage from \$20 million to \$30 million, according to Sherif Omer, chairman of the parliament's Health Committee. But, this is not the first time it has been brought up in the Assembly. He said that while similar questions concerning the budgeting of the grant had been raised by MPs, the government failed to respond as a result of the cabinet reshuffle.

During this session, however, the criticism poured forth freely. "I am sure that family planning is now a matter of life and death, but we want to know what money we received [from USAID since 1978], and how it was spent," said Zakaria Azmi, a leading NDP deputy from Zeitoun. "It is no secret that most of the grant's allocations are spent on incentives, bonuses, luxury cars and advertisements," he asserted.

Directing his questions to the Minister of Health and Population, Ismail Salam, Azmi stated, "I want the minister of health to respond to me about a letter from USAID requesting that the MOHP investigate how LE511,000 of the grant was spent without any justified reason."

The leader of the NDP parliamentary ma-

jority, Ahmed Abu Zeid, took matters a step further by recalling how he was offered a sum of money at the end of a lecture course on family planning which he had attended. Cases like this pointed to the misappropriation of funds.

"It is clear that the second stage of the agreement was rife with shady dealings such as removing the seats from fully-loaded imported cars and using the vehicles to transport construction materials to the villages of former officials concerned with population issues in Egypt," said Ayman Nour, a Wafd MP. The doling out of exorbitant bonuses, he said, was another example. Nour presented Salam with a document revealing his approval of a 400 per cent bonus to the MOHP's first under-secretary, Samir Sultan. Handouts, he said, have also found their way into the pockets of religious leaders and intellectuals who agree not to speak out against family planning.

Other MPs like El-Badri Farghali, representing the leftist Tagammu Party, directed their questions at other state institutions like Al-Azhar. "I want to know where Al-Azhar and the Awqaf Ministry (religious endow-

ments) stand on this issue, since they are really the bodies with a role to play," said Farghali. He also criticised the role played by USAID in Egypt, and stated, "This report [of the Assembly's Health Committee] talks about reducing the fertility rates in Egypt. I don't know why this US agency is after even our fertility rates."

While misappropriation of funds served as the focus of the debate, it became quickly evident that the issue of family planning policies as a whole was being called into question. Sameh Sobehi, an NDP MP from Qanater, north of Cairo, said the information provided in the media on family planning devices is by no means sufficient, and called for the establishment of "committees on a grassroots level in each village which would be responsible for controlling the fertility rates in each home."

Tackling the complaints one by one, Health and Population Minister Salam emphasised that population control is one of Egypt's main problems now. "This is why it requires the efforts of the whole nation, not just the executive agencies," he said, adding that the MOHP has great potential to move

on this issue "by uniting efforts and training MOHP personnel."

Addressing the issue of misallocation of funds and "shady dealings", Salam stated that some of the grant money was used to re-equip 800 family planning clinics and train their staff. He also noted that the case surrounding the letter submitted by USAID concerning how LE511,000 of the grant was spent was referred to the Administrative Prosecution for investigation.

With the issue of bonuses and incentives on the table, Salam said, "Yes, I give all hard-working employees who work from 8am to 8pm bonuses, and I would not hesitate to give them 20-times their salaries."

"But no one in the minister's office," he said, "receives money from this grant."

As the debate drew to a close, MPs overwhelmingly approved a request to refer the whole issue to the Central Auditing Agency (CAA).

The Assembly has to date discussed around 11 agreements signed with USAID, of which five were sharply criticised and two referred to a fact-finding commission and the CAA for closer investigation.

Crucial amendment

THE PEOPLE'S Assembly's Legislative and Constitutional Affairs Committee has approved a legal amendment stipulating that any case filed in any court should be based on a direct personal interest, otherwise it will be rejected.

The amendment was to modify article 3 of the Commercial and Civil Pleading Law. The committee's action, which must be endorsed by the full Assembly before taking effect, would apply to all cases, including those that are pending in courts.

The amendment was approved with surprising speed by a vast majority of committee members, most of them belonging to the ruling National Democratic Party, on Monday. However, it was strongly attacked by Justice Minister Farouq Saif El-Nasr during the debate. He even threatened to withdraw from the committee meeting if the amendment was approved. But he did not attend the voting session.

The amendment was submitted by the Assembly member for Talkha city, in Daqahliya Governorate, Ri-faat El-Rimisy. The justice minister based his rejection on the premise that the government could not approve a new law "decreed mainly to serve one person." Mohamed Guwily, the committee's deputy chairman and MP for Shubra in Cairo, said the amendment clearly comes in favour of Dr. Nasr Hamid Abu Zeid, a professor at Cairo University's Faculty of Arts, who faces a court ruling that separates him from his wife.

Last year, a Cairo court of appeal ordered Abu Zeid separated from his wife after convicting him of apostasy. Some lawyers, acting on behalf of Abu Zeid, contested the ruling before the Court of Cassation, Egypt's highest tribunal. They argued that the case filed in the appeals court by Sheikh Youssef El-Badri, an Islamist, was not based on direct personal interest. The new amendment, once ratified by the full Assembly, could come in Abu Zeid's favour. The Court of Cassation is scheduled to issue its final ruling next month.

Former minister blasted

Leader of the opposition Wafd Party Yassin Seraggeddin launched an attack in the People's Assembly this week against the performance of former *Al-Awqaf* (religious endowments) minister and the Assembly's deputy for Helwan, Mohamed Ali Mahgoub.

Seraggeddin seized the opportunity of a debate on a report prepared by the Assembly's Committee of Religious and Social Affairs and *Awqaf* to accuse Mahgoub of failing to control corruption during his tenure at the ministry. The committee's report was written in response to criticism from the Central Auditing Agency (CAA) in a report on the performance of *Al-Awqaf* Ministry and the Egyptian *Waqf* Organisation (EWO) during the period from October 1992 to September 1993.

Seraggeddin said he planned to table a parliamentary interpellation regarding the charges against Mahgoub, who was sacked in January's government reshuffle. "When he was in his ministerial post, plunder and looting reached their climax and corruption was rampant," Seraggeddin claimed, pointing out that Mahgoub was currently under investigation by the prosecutor general, and that the EWO's former chairman had been sent to trial before a criminal court for failing to enforce court rulings.

"I, as a deputy of the people, call for a confrontation of the problems listed in the CAA report, including those concerned with [the misappropriation of] mosque donations [*nazoor*], the awarding of contracts, *Awqaf* and recovering EWO money," said Seraggeddin. He called on the newly appointed *Waqf* Minister Hamdi Zaqqouq to rectify these problems.

However, Seraggeddin himself came in for some major criticism from deputies from the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP). Foremost among them was Abdel-Reheem El-Ghoul, a member from Qena in Upper Egypt, and head of the Assembly's Youth Committee. He stoutly defended El-Mahgoub, emphasising that accusations against ministers should not be based on hearsay nor made for political motives. "We [NDP members] do not praise a minister while he is in his post and then attack

him when he leaves," said El-Ghoul. He asserted that El-Mahgoub was a proficient politician who had achieved a lot on behalf of the nation, including bringing 150,000 mosques under the direct supervision of the Ministry of *Al-Awqaf* and instituting a large number of training programmes for mosque *imams*. These moves were largely intended to prevent the preaching of militant Islam in the nation's mosques.

This seemed to wrong-foot Seraggeddin, who reacted by rejecting any criticism of his own party's ideology. "The Wafd's ideology is to safeguard citizens' rights. When the interpellation comes, you will hear some incredible things," Seraggeddin said.

According to the new *awqaf* minister, Hamdi Zaqqouq, most of the allegations of corrupt practices listed in the CAA report had been referred to the prosecutor general's office for investigation, while efforts were being made by the EWO to collect outstanding debts, mainly in the form of rent payments from *waqf* land leased to tenants. Zaqqouq said that a new EWO chairman had been appointed and that a total review of the EWO's administration was being conducted to ensure that regulations and policies were strictly adhered to.

"As a matter of fact, we do not cover up corruption and the misappropriation of funds; we fight against it," said Zaqqouq, adding that the ministry had allocated LE8.5 million between 1993 and 1995 to support mosques.

Zaqqouq also defended Mahgoub. "We fully appreciate Mahgoub. The fact remains that the CAA was critical of



Wafdist MP Yassin Seraggeddin conferring, during a heated parliamentary session, with NDP leaders Youssef Wali and Kamal El-Shazli

all state institutions, and the Ministry of *Al-Awqaf* was no exception," he said.

Discussion of Mahgoub's role took a surprising twist when Ragab Hilal Hemida, the single deputy representing the opposition Liberal Party, surprised MPs by condemning the attacks on Mahgoub. In last December's parliamentary election, Mustafa Bakri, editor of *Al-Ahram*, the Liberal Party's newspaper, had stood against Mahgoub in Helwan. Mahgoub won the election, but Bakri made use of the party newspaper to launch a press campaign against him, accusing him of corruption. Mahgoub responded by filing a lawsuit against Bakri.

Then, in last Monday's session, Hemida, who as the Liberal Party's secretary-general, was fully expected to join Seraggeddin in his attack on Mahgoub, said instead

that he was not prepared to accuse anyone without sufficient evidence. "It is true that the former *Al-Awqaf* minister and other *Awqaf* leaders are being investigated by the prosecutor-general and state security prosecution, but investigations are still under way. There hasn't been a final judgement yet," Hemida said.

He too cited the fact that the CAA had criticised various ministries in its reports, but that parliamentary discussions had not taken the form of personal attacks on the ministers concerned. Observers were quick to note that Hemida's words were conspicuously absent from the following day's parliamentary coverage in the Liberal Party's newspaper, *Al-Ahram*.

Debate also centred on *nazoor* (donations), money given mainly to old mosques, often containing the tombs of popular religious figures. The CAA investigation had discovered that most of this money, intended for mosque upkeep and restoration, found its way into the pockets of mosque caretakers. The report urged the Ministry of *Al-Awqaf* to tighten its control over these funds. MPs commented that it was deplorable that the money was misappropriated, especially as many old mosques were still in need of restoration after the 1992 earthquake.

According to *Awqaf* Minister Zaqqouq, the total revenue of *nazoor* is around LE4 million annually, and mosque staff take around 25 per cent of this total. He said that the ministry had spent as much as LE171 million on renovating around 1,600 mosques, and a further LE100 million on an additional 287 mosques. "We need LE390 million to conduct more renovation work, so *nazoor* revenue is just a drop in the ocean in any case," he added.

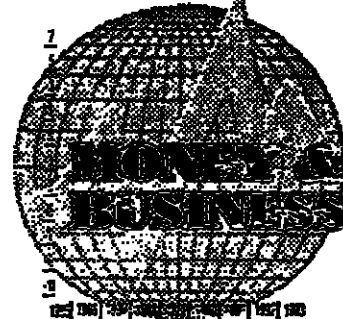
Discussions on *nazoor* took an ideological turn when Sameh Ashour, the only Nasserite MP in the Assembly, sharply criticised the concept of *nazoor* as a popular tradition of giving money to honour a Muslim holy man (or woman). "We are not idol worshippers," he argued. "*Nazoor* is not a folk tradition of this sort; rather it is money given to help the poor and orphans and for the renovation of mosques."

World Bank grant

TO HELP Lebanon rebuild itself after the Israeli bombardment, the World Bank has assigned its experts to carry out an assessment of the damage and destruction to the country's infrastructure. It is expected that this will take place shortly after the implementation of a full cease fire.

In addition to potential aid for Lebanon, the World Bank announced it intends to offer a \$20mn emergency aid package for the West Bank and Gaza to rebuild its damaged infrastructure.

MONEY & BUSINESS



British beef confiscated

CAIRO airport authorities seized a 3 ton British beef consignment invalid for consumption. Authorities were alerted to the matter after a security guard noticed a particularly pungent smell emanating from one of the refrigerators in the cargo section, which was the one carrying the beef.

Upon examination, quarantine station officials determined the meat unfit for human consumption. The beef was confiscated in the presence of the British company's representative.

NBE: A leading position

GUIDED by its long-standing experience along 98 years, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) is rendered to be one of the main pillars of the national economy. This is manifested in its pioneering role in the Egyptian banking system in addition to its sound presence in the Arab world and internationally.

In the light of the bank's pioneering role in accelerating the national economy and the banking system, NBE has initiated various activities, mainly:

— NBE has been the first Egyptian bank to market its services and activities via the international information network, the Internet, accessible to 45mn persons. The said network enables its members worldwide and in no time to have access to NBE's latest services, whether traditional or non-traditional, besides investment opportunities in all fields.

On the other hand, the Internet covers all different fields of information all over the world, thus facilitating the preparation of the bank's studies and research, which are the bank's main assets on formulating its technical and administrative decisions.

Moreover, the bank may currently use the widespread Internet in dispatching and receiving electronic mail from and to any place in the world in just a few seconds.

— In terms of penetrating non-traditional fields to enhance investment and the money market in Egypt, NBE has embarked upon establishing two leasing companies. The first will be established in cooperation with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the Japanese Orix Group being the leading company worldwide in the field of leasing. The second will be established in cooperation with the German

Bank of Commerce and a group of local businessmen.

The first company shall be specialised in light equipment with a capital of LE20mn, where foreign participation accounts for 61 per cent. Meanwhile, the company is currently established to be the first company in this field in Egypt. The second company shall be specialised in heavy equipment, with an initial capital of LE20mn in the first phase. The German partner shall participate with 35 per cent, leaving the remaining portion for Egyptian partners headed by NBE.

The multiplication of foreign partners in each company is envisaged to prevent monopoly in the Egyptian market and provides for attaining optimal offers. In addition, it provides expertise and fuels competition among foreign partners for the best level of performance in the market.

Plans to establish a free zone with Jordan discussed

A PRELIMINARY meeting of the Jordanian-Egyptian Higher Council for Cooperation was held in the Jordanian capital of Amman last week, to discuss the possibilities of establishing a commercial free zone between the two countries.

Sources from the Ministry of Economy stated that establishing a commercial free zone between Egypt and Jordan would facilitate and increase commercial exchange activity. Likewise, means of removing obstacles hindering the movement of goods was also discussed.

Increasing land, sea and air transportation and boosting investment would result in doubling the volume of commercial exchange.

Sources said that within the framework of implementing a commercial free zone, future discussions would also include plans to reduce tariffs charged on freight, in addition to lowering miscellaneous tariffs and taxes charged at Egyptian ports and the Jordanian port of Aqaba.

Top speakers confirmed

LEADING figures in global marketing communications will address the International Advertising Association's (IAA) 35th World Congress, "Visions: Communicating with Consumers in a Multimedia World", June 9-12 1996 at the Korea Exhibition Centre in Seoul, Korea. The event will focus on three major areas with a full day devoted to each.

The IAA's global network comprises more than 3600 members in 89 countries worldwide. It has also NGO consultative status with UNESCO and other UN agencies.

As is the practice that the host country of the succeeding IAA Congress hold a gala night to welcome and invite attendees to the coming congress, Egypt, host of the IAA 1998 Congress, will hold a gala night with an Egyptian oriental character under the name "Egyptian Night" on the congress' last day.

Business news

Arab world directory
AN ARAB world commercial directory will be distributed soon. Seventeen countries are included in this directory.

Sameh El-Hadi, general manager of the Experience Marketing Co, sole agent in the Arab world for the directory, said that the publication of such a directory will help boost commercial exchange among Arab countries.

Sameh added that the aim of increasing economic cooperation comes at a time when the Arab world must face many of the newly-formed trade blocs which have developed all over the world.

Egyptian-EU talks

AMBASSADOR Gamal El-Bayoumi, aide to the Egyptian foreign minister, stated that talks with the EU are underway to reach a partnership agreement soon.

The two sides have not yet agreed on some articles.

The ambassador, who heads the Egyptian side in these talks added that he discussed with his European counterparts during the first two days, means of pushing talks between the two sides.

Oil for food talks resume

LAST MONDAY, Iraq and the United States resumed oil for food talks in New York.

Tarek Aziz, Iraqi deputy premier, said that the negotiating team left Baghdad heading to New York for the third round of talks that stopped on 24 April after objections were raised by Britain and the United States. On the other hand, Iraqi newspapers called for the stopping of the United States' intervention in these talks.

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Selling privatisation politically

By Nemat Shafik

Privatisation is still sweeping the globe with an expected \$6 trillion in assets to be divested by public sectors around the world over the next 20 years. The fact that appropriately structured privatisation initiatives can result in vast improvements in the performance of firms is not debated much any more. The empirical evidence on efficiency and welfare gains that result from privatisation is now fairly solid. The new battleground is not efficiency, but distribution — who gets the gains that are realised? Which parties with a vested interest — managers, workers, consumers, or taxpayers — will benefit from privatisation?

In all countries politicians must cope with criticisms that privatisation is equivalent to selling the family silver; that assets are being given away cheaply; that corrupt methods were used; that too much foreign ownership results; that jobs will be eliminated and wages cut; and that consumers will have to pay higher prices for reduced service. Some of these criticisms reflect the fact that there will be winners and losers from privatisation. Therefore, politicians must find a way to compensate the losers without sacrificing the efficiency gains that privatisation is intended to achieve. Recent innovations in selling privatisation initiatives politically include more market-based methods for valuing firms (which benefit taxpayers), giveaways and under-pricing (which benefit citizens who apply to be shareholders), management buy-outs (which favour managers), employee share ownership schemes (which compensate workers), and "golden shares" or preferences for domestic investors to appease nationalist fears of a foreign takeover.

No politician wants to be accused of selling public assets cheaply, especially where raising revenues is a priority for the government. Until recently, technical methods to value firms, such as earnings, discounted cash flow, asset values, dividends, and comparable companies or acquisitions, have been heavily utilised. Although such methods continue to play a role, there have been a variety of innovations that allow for a greater reliance on market mechanisms to set the prices of firms. These innovative methods include: (1) Auction methods that allow bidders to determine values; (2) Issuing shares based on a survey of institutional investors to insure pricing is consistent with market sentiment; and (3) Mass privatisation programmes that allow the public to determine the value of firms through their bids.

Governments are also increasingly using giveaways to win political support for privatisation. Where privatisation occurs through stock market flotation, governments often under-price shares to realise widespread ownership and to make privatisation popular. In the United Kingdom, privatisation shares were "under-priced" by 37 per cent, while in the rest of the world underpricing of privatisations averages around 24 per cent. In the former Soviet republics and much of Central and Eastern Europe, governments simply gave shares in state-owned companies to citizens for free under "mass privatisation" programmes.

Appealing nationalist fears of foreign or private sector control of "strategic" state-owned enterprises can be achieved through restrictions on the portion of shares which foreigners can own or preferences for domestic buyers. In about 85 per cent of privatisation schemes undertaken through stock market flotation worldwide, domestic investors have gotten preferential share allocations (but rarely get price discounts) and foreign investors, on average, have been allocated a maximum of 19-20 per cent of the total shares. Retaining public sector control through equity or "golden shares" that give government veto rights over major decisions is also very common. In almost all utility privatisations that have taken place in recent years, governments have retained golden shares but have never had to exercise these rights.

Management buy-outs have been widely used in countries where state-owned enterprise management has resisted privatisation or where outside investor interest in certain firms is limited. The success of management buy-outs depends critically on three factors: (1) Whether management has a sufficient equity stake in the form of a down payment; (2) Whether banks (not governments) have provided the financing required for such transactions, which tend to be highly leveraged; and (3) Whether incumbent management has (or has access to) the necessary skills and technical know-how to improve the performance of the firm.

Employee share ownership schemes are also a means of overcoming the frequent opposition to privatisation from labour which fears mass layoffs. Although there are many anecdotes about job losses associated with privatisation (especially since most state-owned enterprises are perceived to be over-staffed), the empirical evidence shows that the level of employment actually rises after privatisation. Workers can also benefit from privatisation through various other mechanisms, such as severance payments, higher wages or appreciation of preferential share allocations. In about 86 per cent of the privatisation share issues worldwide, there were some preferences granted to workers, with an average share allocation for employees reaching 6 per cent.

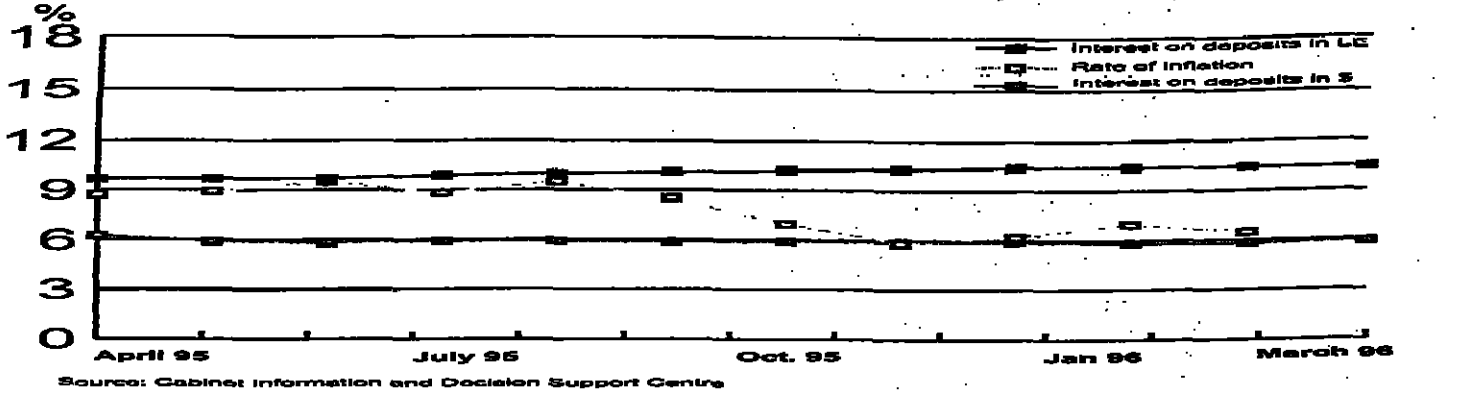
The key issue for the future is that selling privatisation politically does not compromise privatisation's efficiency objectives. Fortunately, most of these innovations are about improving the informational content of prices (like better valuation) or are about pure distribution of the benefits (such as mass privatisation, underpricing public offerings, employee share ownership schemes or management buy-outs); in other words, who gets what. In some cases, the design of political compensation schemes has thwarted efficiency objectives such as when employee share ownership schemes do not allow workers to trade shares freely, or where management buy-outs do not require managers to commit their own equity to the firm, or where mass privatisations are non-transparent and do not lay the basis for efficient asset markets. But these pitfalls can be avoided to insure that the distributional objective of privatisation raises do not undermine the primary objective of making firms more efficient.

The writer is a visiting professor at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania where she teaches a graduate course on international privatisation.

Bank report gives mixed picture

A report recently submitted by the Central Bank of Egypt (CBE) to the People's Assembly revealed new developments in Egypt's monetary and financial situation. Gamal Essam El-Din reports

Interest rates on deposits in LE and \$ and the rate of inflation



Source: Cabinet Information and Decision Support Centre

A 109-page Central Bank of Egypt (CBE) report for the fiscal year 1994/95 emphasised that the new IMF-inspired liberalisation policies adopted in May 1991 had a positive impact on the country's economy. Topping the list of benefits accrued was a LE2 billion decline in net credit provided to the public sector, while net credit provided for the private sector increased by LE7.2 billion. In fiscal 94/95, as much as LE16.5 billion was given to the private sector versus LE12.4 billion allocated to the public sector.

The report noted that although interest rates on bank savings and deposits decreased as a result of the new liberalisation policies, the local currency deposits in Egyptian banks increased from LE136.9 billion in 93/94 to LE156.5 billion in 94/95. In addition, foreign exchange deposits rose from \$17 billion in 93/94 to \$17.9 billion in 94/95. The report also showed that the state budget deficit fell to 1.6 per cent of GDP while the inflation rate increased to 9.9 per cent, or by 3.5 per cent over the previous year's figure.

On the other hand, revealed the report, Egypt's foreign debts jumped to \$33 billion in fiscal 1994/95, an increase of \$2.1 billion over the previous year's level. The value of local debts jumped by LE10.7 billion over the previous year's figure to reach LE134.7 billion. As a whole, Egypt's foreign and domestic debt is estimated at LE263.5 billion. The report added that Egypt owes the Paris Club countries \$27.2 billion, or 82.6 per cent of the country's total foreign debt. Another \$3.8 billion is owed to a number of international lending institutions and \$700 million is owed to non-Paris Club countries.

At the top of the list of creditor countries are France and the US, to whom Egypt owes about \$6.6 billion each. Japan is third with \$5.55 billion and Germany is fourth with \$3.8 billion. The report noted that Egypt owes the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) \$2.79 billion. To meet its obligations, the CBE report said, Egypt has paid as much as \$1.9 billion, a \$121 million increase over the previous year's debt servicing figure. Another LE13.2 billion were paid as part settlement on local debts.

The increase in the country's debts was hotly debated this week in the People's Assembly. In a question directed to Finance Minister Mohamed El-Gharib, Wafd MP Ayman Nour said he was "extremely alarmed" by the dramatic rise in the debt level reported by the CBE. Nour stated that Egypt's foreign debts increased from \$27 billion in June 1991 to \$33 billion in June 1995. Local debts, he said, increased from LE77 billion in June 1991 to LE133 billion in June 1995.

"This is by no means a positive indicator at all, and this continuous rise in debts could negatively affect development, the low-

income classes and the balance of payments," Nour said.

However, El-Gharib dismissed any negative effects of debts on development, stating that the gross national product (GNP) now stands at an estimated LE225 billion. "This means that these debts account for only five per cent of GNP," he added that this figure is not only small in relation to that of other countries, but is much lower than it was 15 years ago due to the writing off of a sizable part of Egypt's foreign debts following the Gulf War and the implementation of the government's reform programme aimed at raising growth rates.

"While most of these debts were used to establish a developed infrastructure in Egypt, great efforts are also being exerted to reduce the level of foreign borrowing," said El-Gharib. He stressed that liberalisation and privatisation policies will finally put an end to the government's borrowing.

Besides debts, the CBE report dealt with other aspects of the economy. Among those was the decline in Egypt's surplus in the balance of payments, which dropped from \$2.158 billion in fiscal 93/94 to \$759 million in 94/95. This decline was a result of a drop in direct foreign investments during the fiscal year.

The report also stated that imports increased by 20.3 per cent over the previous year's level, with the value of oil exports increasing from \$1.8 billion in fiscal 93/94 to \$2.2 billion

in fiscal 94/95. It also reported that the value of cotton exports increased sharply to \$300 million, while during the previous year it stood at \$45 million. The value of other exports rose to \$993 million.

The CBE report said that revenue from the Suez Canal increased in 94/95 by 3.4 per cent to reach \$2.1 billion. Focusing on the issue of unemployment, the report revealed that the number of unemployed people rose to 1.7 million, or 9.6 per cent of the workforce that amounts to 16.5 million.

Touching on the performance of the banking sector, the CBE report said that the number of banks in Egypt declined to 81, but seven mutual funds with a paid-up capital of LE1.3 billion and nine stock exchange companies with a paid-up capital of LE9 million were established. As a result, the report added, the total number of stock exchange companies in Egypt rose to 88, with their overall capital reaching LE158.5 million.

During a discussion at the Assembly's Economic Committee, Nawal El-Tatary, the minister of economy, said the banking sector moves in a carefully calculated way to maintain the inflation rate at 8.5 per cent. "Within this scenario, the future role of banks is to absorb any excessive monetary liquidity on the market while at the same time meeting the demand for credit," El-Tatary said.

The ecological dimension

The price of pollution and environmental degradation, experts assert, is often paid in the form of stunted economic growth. Reem Leila reports

Brought together by a World Bank satellite transmission organised by the United States Cultural Centre, leading environmental experts recently stressed that developing countries, especially Egypt, will face dire economic and ecological problems resulting from the destruction of their environment.

Joel Makower, an environmental writer, speaking from Washington, said that serious environmental degradation significantly curbs Egypt's efforts at sustainable development and jeopardises economic growth and the health and livelihood of the country's citizens. "Egypt needs to get into the habit of adding the environmental dimension to such main indicators of wealth creation as food, technology, energy, commodity prices and financial transactions," he said.

Businesses operating in developing countries, said Robert Speidel, director of Public Utilities at the Global Environmental Fund (GEF), cannot expect to move in, destroy the environment and then leave. He said people have begun to understand the fact that the destruction of their surrounding environment will affect their economy. Consequently, developing countries are no longer willing to ignore the issue, or to give something for nothing.

"Less conservative businesses are already turning the environmental regulations to their benefit," stated Speidel. "Factories that reduce their feed stock consumption and waste, rather than increasing their scrubbing bills are the ones that increase their market viability in an environmentally-conscious world."

According to a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded comparative risk assessment undertaken in 1994, Cairo has the highest level of air pollution in the world in terms of suspended particulates and lead. This disastrously high level of particulates is responsible for 10,000

to 25,000 deaths per year. In addition, children raised in Cairo face the risk of losing an average of 4.25 IQ points as a result of lead pollution. And agriculture, which accounts for over 80 per cent of Egypt's water consumption, is another major victim of water pollution. As a result of water pollution, a large amount of Egypt's agricultural lands are threatened by desertification every year. Moreover, excessive use of fertilisers and pesticides, which doubled during the 1980s and 90s, seriously affected the size of the harvest.

According to James Goggin, acting director of USAID's Environmental Office in Cairo, certain procedures and measures should be taken to put an end to this issue. There are innovative, market-based ways of mobilising resources, he said, such as involving the private sector in financing environmental investments, managing water supplies, waste water disposal, sanitary landfills and special industrial waste facilities on a user-charge basis. Other measures include increasing the price of water and electricity to force industry, services, middle and high-income consumers to shoulder the full cost of these resources. Moreover, raising taxes in order to increase revenues to be used in protecting the environment is another prudent measure that could be undertaken.

"Energy subsidies in Egypt are estimated at \$25 billion per year," he said.

In addition to existing environmental safeguards, USAID will introduce to a large part of the industrial sector new technology that will help them to save money and improve the quality of their products.

"Pollution prevention assessments have been performed in the public and private sectors in the fields of metal finishing, food processing and textiles," noted Goggin. "More than LE1 million in savings were realised in these three fields."

Egypt-Taiwan ties budding

Expanding cooperation was the theme of a Taiwanese-Egyptian meeting of officials and businessmen. Niveen Wahish reports

A high-ranking delegation of Taiwanese officials and businessmen was in Cairo this week to discuss economic cooperation between the two countries and to attend the first meeting of the Joint Business Council between members of the Egyptian Businessmen's Association (EBA) and Taiwanese businessmen from the Chinese National Association of Industry and Commerce (CNAIC).

Ernest Lin, director of the CNAIC, said that "Egypt and Taiwan have complementary economies, which means that there are great opportunities for cooperation between the two countries." He said that Taiwanese businessmen will begin by looking for export opportunities to Egypt by promoting their goods to their Egyptian counterparts. This, however, is just the beginning. "They are just testing the market," stated Lin.

He said that not only does Egypt offer a wide variety of raw materials that can be imported by Taiwan for use in its industries, but production costs are much lower in Egypt, especially for those interested in exporting to the surrounding areas such as Africa, the Middle East and Europe. He also said that the investment incentives listed by Ibrahim Fawzy, president of the General Authority for Investment, while addressing the business council, were "very inviting for Taiwanese businessmen to set up business in Egypt."

Among the incentives cited by Fawzy was companies' legal right to repatriate profit realised on their invested capital. He also said that investors in Egypt receive a five-year tax holiday for projects set up in Cairo, while those establishing projects in the industrial cities and outlying areas receive a 10-year tax holiday. In addition, machinery and capital equipment are subject only to a five per cent customs tariff.

In reviewing the fields of cooperation between the two countries, Lin said that they are not limited to trade and investment but also include tourism. He said that Egypt has a great tourist market in Taiwan but it needs to promote itself more vigorously. However, he said, "There is no direct airline service between the two countries." The lack of direct transportation between the two countries is a major hindrance to cooperation.

Wen-Hsien Chen, chairman of the International Affairs Committee at the Taiwanese Ministry of Transport, said that among other Asian countries, Taiwan is second only to Japan in terms of the number of citizens who travel abroad on holiday. Approximately five million Taiwanese per year go abroad on holiday. However, only a small portion of this comes to Egypt. On the whole, he said, they are different from Western tourists. "They do not just come to relax and see the sights, but come to do business as well," he stated. Chen said that the lack of a direct air link is a barrier that discourages tourists and businessmen alike.

Also speaking before the joint business council, Shu-Jou Lee, the Taiwanese vice-minister for Economic Affairs, said that promoting trade and investment between the two countries will be of mutual benefit. He suggested a number of ways to promote bilateral economic cooperation such as dispatching Taiwanese economic development policy experts to pass on the knowledge gained by Taiwan while devising and implementing its macroeconomic development. Lee also urged the Egyptian government to send officials to Taiwan for training in economic development planning and to take part in international trade fairs. Moreover, he suggested that small and micro-enterprises from both countries coordinate their efforts and form joint ventures in order to increase their competitiveness.

EAB bonds issue

THE EGYPTIAN-AMERICAN BANK (EAB) this Monday launched a five year registered bond issue worth LE200 million. The issue comprises negotiable bonds that cannot be converted to shares. Each will have a fixed coupon of 10.75 per cent.

The bonds will be available in the form of debentures valued at LE1,000, LE5,000, LE25,000, LE50,000 and LE100,000. Buyers receive 10 coupons with each debenture through which they will cash the yield at the coupon's expiry date.

The subscription will be open for 30 days, unless the issue is fully subscribed within 10 days, the minimum subscription period. Bonds will be listed in both the Cairo and Alexandria stock exchanges three months after subscription is closed.

In the case of over-subscription, the bank intends to allocate bonds to subscribers according to the ratio of their bid as a percentage of the whole issue. All subscription bids will be met, especially those submitted by small investors.

EAB, which has an authorised capital of LE100 million, is owned by the Bank of Alexandria (51 per cent) and the Amex Holdings, Incorporated (49 per cent).

Floating pumps fixed

THE MINISTRY of Economy and International Cooperation recently signed an agreement with the Japanese Embassy whereby the ministry will receive LE10 million for the renovation or replacement of 11 floating pumps in Upper Egypt.

The agreement represents the implementation of the second phase of a grant provided by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) which aims at replacing or renovating 45 floating pumps in Upper Egypt. These pumps are needed to draw irrigation water from the Nile, which lies at a level lower than that of the cultivated lands. They are also the main source of irrigation water for about 20,000 feddans of land.

During the first implementation phase of the grant, 10 floating pumps were replaced in two stages, costing a total of LE32.48 million.

The JICA is responsible only for supplying the needed machinery while the Mechanical and Electrical Department of the Ministry of Public Works and Water Resources will be responsible for operating and servicing the pumping stations.

Trading takes a holiday

THERE was little trading action on the stock exchange during the week ending 2 May as a result of the three-day *Eid Al-Adha* and labour day holidays. Consequently, the volume of transactions plummeted to LE17.8 million after having reached LE108.2 million the previous week. Along the same lines, the General Market Index slipped to 199.79 points. Shares of the Egypt Sponge Company lost LE3 per share to close at LE80 while those of the United Arab Spinning and Weaving Company (UNRAB), slipped by LE0.75 to level off at LE32.

Other companies, however, performed well despite the shortened work week. Shares of the Amoun Pharmaceuticals Company gained LE15 per share to close at LE152.

The financial sector index gained 0.48 to close at 202.92, with trading in shares of the Alexandria Commercial and Marine Bank accounting for LE5.19 million in shares or 29.13 per cent of the total value of market transactions. It was the Egyptian Expatriates Development and Investment Company, however, which cornered the largest percentage of the total volume of shares traded. Although trading in its shares accounted for 36.13 per cent of total dealings, the value of its shares fell by LE0.5 to close at LE14.25. Shares of the Montazeh Tourism and Investment Company registered the highest increase in share value, soaring in value by 60 per cent to top off at LE160.

Edited by Ghada Ragab

Final to a

EU ple regional

Peace between... until France... construction... their pockets... Eritrean troops... Al-Kubra... following a... men's garrison... tense stand-off... neighbouring countries... ever since. But... tion efforts a new... posed last week. Yemen and France... their dispute over a... chipclap to international... accord stipulates that... refrain from using force... take their dispute to a... es from the International... The Yemeni ambassador... Mohamed Luqman, who... ly, "Yemen is committed... welcome Eritrea's... ciple of international...

Final status staggers to a start

As they stagger into the three-year final stage of the peace process, the PLO and Israel began talks this week by admitting their differences and finding common ground. Samia Nkrumah reports from Taba

By the time the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Israel had issued their joint communiqué last Monday, after inaugurating final-status talks in Taba, it was clear that a conclusive peace settlement remains a difficult target.

Nevertheless, the two-day talks saw both sides expressing their determination to pursue peace through agreed political processes. In practical terms, they agreed to form a joint steering committee comprising four or five persons from each side. The committee will be entrusted with the job of determining the elements of permanent-status negotiations and defining the framework and modalities of future talks. The next step would be to establish working groups which would meet regularly.

But the mutual resolve only highlighted the difficulties which the negotiators will face in the months and years to come. Chief Palestinian negotiator Mahmoud Abbas — better known as Abu Mazen — and his Israeli counterpart Uriel Savir, the director-general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, both repeatedly stated on several occasions during the Taba talks that future negotiations would not be easy.

Opening remarks by the Palestinians and Israelis at the talks outlined their conflicting objectives. Two fundamental differences stood out. The first centred around Abu Mazen's reference to resolutions of "international legitimacy" and the second involved the question of Jerusalem.

There was speculation that the Israelis had pressured Abu Mazen to omit United Nations

Security Council Resolution 194 — concerning the right of return of Palestinian refugees who were driven from their homes in 1948 — from the Palestinian statement. But this was vehemently denied by both chief negotiators. Nevertheless, the omission was not without portent. It is a reminder that one side holds the stakes. The refugee issue should be on the agenda of the permanent-status negotiations, according to article five of the 1993 Palestinian-Israeli Declaration of Principles.

Abu Mazen, one of the architects of Oslo II, pointed out that while the military balance of power was in Israel's favour, the Palestinian question was at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Without its settlement, comprehensive peace, to which all parties aspire, will be incomplete, he said.

Abu Mazen told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the two sides did not disagree with the contents of each other's speeches, but had simply stated their differing positions. "We said that we aspire to a Palestinian independent state within the June 1967 borders and to have East Jerusalem, which falls within these borders, as its capital," he said.

The implementation of UN resolutions 242 and 338 was mentioned in the Palestinians' opening speech. While both resolutions make no mention of a Palestinian state, "they refer to an end of the Israeli occupation. What does an end to occupation, settlement of borders, security arrangements and relations with neighbours imply? Surely not a return to the occupation," snapped Abu Mazen.

As expected, Savir's speech contained no reference to an independent state and, instead, proclaimed that one thing was eternal: Israel's united capital, Jerusalem. Savir told the *Weekly*, "Jerusalem is a very emotional issue and I think it should be left to the end." He argued that discretion on the contents of the talks was necessary for them to make good progress. "Intensive work has to be done and taboos have to be broken, and these can only be done bilaterally," he said. "At a certain point we will need help. Whenever we are close to a breakthrough or a crisis we often come to Egypt." Savir did not rule out the possibility of an informal meeting of Israeli and Palestinian negotiators before the Israeli elections at the end of the month.

At a reception for the delegates, Ambassador Adel Safi, first under-secretary at the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, expressed Egypt's hope that the final-status talks would be concluded in less than three years and hopefully in two.

Commenting on the protracted closure of Gaza and the West Bank since a series of suicide bombings in Israel last February, Savir said, "I do not want to be critical of our Palestinian partners. If they had done a year ago what they are doing now, things would have been easier." He noted that the Palestinians were today waging a very courageous battle against Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, "not for us, but for their own interest and against those challenging their authority".

Savir continued, "Closure is

for one reason only. We have clear alerts of continued suicide attacks. A few months down the line the situation will be much improved. We will gradually open up." Abu Mazen, on the other hand, felt the measures taken so far by the Israeli government to ease the closure were insignificant.

Savir spoke of a "people-to-people programme" which would encourage meetings between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples. "We are now better negotiators now. We are thinking together," he said. That may be true of the politicians whose body language said it all. Across the conference table, Gamal Al-Tarifi, a member of the Palestinian team, was seen winking at Yoel Zinger, a legal advisor to the Israeli side and engineer of Oslo II.

The well-equipped Israeli press entourage had a far more prominent presence than those of the Palestinians and other Arab nations in Taba. The latter were thin on the ground and hardly mixed with the Israeli journalists, who had a press office with high-tech facilities and refreshments at their disposal.

This week's talks also wrung a promise from both sides to expedite the work of their existing committees to ensure the implementation of the Interim Agreement which was concluded almost nine months ago in Taba. Guaranteeing safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, releasing Palestinian prisoners and implementing the first phase of redeployment in Hebron are among the main pledges that Israelis have not fulfilled yet.

Countdown beyond zero

Graham Usher, in Jerusalem, wonders whether final status negotiations will be as tortuous, bloody and inconclusive as their 'interim' predecessor

When Palestinian and Israeli negotiators met in Taba on 5 May to kick off Oslo's final status negotiations, their official stances vis à vis the issues of Jerusalem, Jewish settlements, refugees, borders and the political status of any future Palestinian entity were presented as absolutes.

On all the issues, said Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat, "the gaps" between the two sides "are wider than ever before", reiterating that what Palestinians seek in any final settlement is Israel's withdrawal to its 1967 borders, the dismantling of all settlements and Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state. Chief Israeli negotiator Uri Savir was more conciliatory. "For Israel, security is paramount," he said, though "there is the central issue of Jerusalem which we perceive as our united capital".

Such flourishes should be seen as anisic to feed to the press. "Both parties will need three years [of negotiations] to get to know each other very well, to know their rights and obligations," said Chief Palestinian negotiator Mahmoud Abbas. "But we are not starting from zero".

They are surely not. The final status talks have been preceded over the last three years by literally hundreds of meetings on the final status issues between Israeli, Palestinian and other academics and politicians. The aim of such informal encounters was "to know each other's red lines and thereby reach agreement on principles in preparation for the [official] talks," says cabinet minister Yossi Beilin, who was the main mover on the Israeli side.

One fruit of these meetings was revealed by the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* on 22 February when it published a joint Palestinian-Israeli document which it said represented an agreed summary of talks on a final status settlement held between Beilin and Abbas in October 1995.

The basic idea of the document is a final deal where Israel would annex around 300 square kilometres of the West Bank to keep 100,000 Jewish settlers under Israeli sovereignty. The remaining 40,000 or so settlers would then be given a choice: evacuate or live within a Palestinian entity. On Jerusalem, both sides agreed the city should remain (sic) "open and undivided" pending further negotiations, but with joint Palestinian-Israeli municipalities being evolved. In return, Israel would recognise a demilitarised Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, retain the Jordan River as its "security border" for 12 years and grant Palestinians the right to absorb refugees into their state on condition they renounce any "right of return" to their original homes inside Israel.

Many Labour Party members and intellectuals were enthusiastic about the document, since it appeared to represent a major retreat by Palestinians on the issues of Jerusalem, settlements and return. For the same reason, Palestinian Authority (PA) officials were wary, insisting that the document was not an "agreement" but only proposals submitted by Beilin for Abbas' "consideration". Palestinian President Yasser Arafat made no comment.

But Shimon Peres was furious. "I have seen the (Beilin-Abbas) document and I reject it outright," he said in February. This may have been pre-election bluster since Peres knows any hint of a deal "dividing" Jerusalem and settlements would be used by the Likud opposition against him. But many Palestinians are anxious that Peres disagrees with a document precisely because of its endorsement of an independent Palestinian state.

On 24 April, Peres' Labour Party quietly dropped from its platform its long-standing opposition to a Palestinian state "west" of the Jordan River. But the Israeli leader has never been an advocate of a separate Palestinian state (except perhaps in Gaza), preferring instead a settlement in the West Bank around a Palestinian-Jordan confederation. This would be based on what Peres has called "functional authority", where the three peoples would be separate politically but where their economies would be integrated, with open borders and "shared" resources. The danger many Palestinians see in this scenario is that while it would not preclude a symbolic form of statehood, it would preclude any independent sovereignty. In such a vision, much of the West Bank's land and resources would be absorbed territorially into Israel while the West Bank's 1.3 million Palestinians would be annexed demographically to Jordan.

Peres' comments on this score do little to ease Palestinian apprehension. When pressed by an Israeli journalist as to why he was so outraged by the Beilin-Abbas document, Peres snapped, "Who says there must be a Palestinian state? The main principle [for Israel] is not to control another people". And, in a special "Passover" interview with the *Jerusalem Post* on 9 April, Peres reaffirmed that his "position" on settlements in any final status deal is "not to dismantle them and not to add to them".

On this at least, Peres' actions have been true to his word. Over the last 18 months, the Israeli army has built 26 new bypass roads in the West Bank and Gaza. These have confiscated around 21 sq km of West Bank and Gaza territory and, added together, are 220 km in length. Their ostensible purpose is to service the 133 Jewish settlements in the occupied territories. But a subsidiary effect, says Palestinian geographer Khalil Tafakji, is to "isolate the main Palestinian towns one from the other" and so prevent any "territorial continuity" emerging between them. The roads have cost the Israeli government a cool \$350 million to construct. "They are hardly temporary measures," says Tafakji.

On 5 May — after hearing that "no date had been set" for the Israeli army's stalled redeployment in Hebron — Israeli Environment Minister Yossi Sarid accused Peres of "giving in to pressure and threats" from Israel's religious parties and settler lobby. But Palestinians fear that the Israeli leader is "giving in" to nothing except Israel's colonial ambitions in the West Bank. If so, the permanent status talks are likely to be every bit as tortuous, inconclusive and bloody as their "interim" predecessor, and regardless of whether Likud's Binyamin Netanyahu or Labour's Shimon Peres is prime minister after the 9 May elections.

EU pledges new regional role

RESPONDING to official and popular Arab frustration with what the Arab world sees as a US bias towards Israel, Italy's foreign minister and leader of the European Union's foreign policy group, troika, Susanna Agnelli, pledged that the EU will play a more active role in the peace process, reports Nevine Khalil.

Agnelli, leading an EU delegation on a two-day tour of Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, said in Beirut that the EU was "determined to contribute to the peace process", but that this must be done in coordination with the US. Although praising the US role in trying to achieve peace in the Middle East, Agnelli said that Europeans had a better understanding of the region because of their proximity. "They [Americans] can come with all their power and try to make peace, but I still think that we know the region better," Agnelli said in Amman, after meeting with Jordanian Prime Minister Abdel-Karim Al-Kabarti.

After extensive talks with President Hosni Mubarak, Agnelli told reporters in Cairo that "our feeling is that the attitude of the world should be more balanced towards the region." Agnelli said that her understanding was that "the people of this region have a feeling of injustice" because not enough was done while Lebanon was being bombed by Israel. She added that this view will be conveyed during the EU's Mediterranean Forum meeting in Italy next week, and ways of moving towards a durable peace will be investigated.

The Italian foreign minister commented that "perhaps there has been too much bending towards Israel" on the part of the US. Egypt's Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said he would "not venture to describe the American role as unbalanced, but certainly there is an imbalance now in dealing with the Arab-Israeli equation." Moussa warned that any bias "would augur ill for the future stability in this region."

Mubarak and Agnelli also discussed the massive amount of military aid Israel is receiving. Moussa said the aid was creating "a dangerous and unbalanced situation, undermining the credibility of an atmosphere of peace." The Egyptian foreign minister added that Egypt would like the EU to play a more active role, by "introducing balance in the establishment of peace and the creation of a climate conducive to a just and lasting peace."

Agnelli shunted between Beirut, Damascus and Jerusalem last month as part of an international drive to broker a truce in South Lebanon between Israel and Hezbollah. During the 17-day ceasefire, Israeli planes and artillery killed more than 200 Lebanese, mainly civilians, including 107 refugees at the Qana UN base south of Beirut.

Agnelli contrasted the international community's response to the Qana massacre with the outrage expressed over Hamas' suicide bombings in Israel. "We think that when something terrible happens, you have to consider all the countries the same," she said.



Palestinian youths shout curses as they hurl stones at Israeli soldiers during protests against the building of a security fence on Arab land in Qalqilya in the West Bank (photo: Reuters)

Hanish: a Parisian settlement

Why should French mediation efforts between Yemen and Eritrea succeed when all others failed, wonders Gamal Nkrumah

Peace between Eritrea and Yemen appeared to be slipping through their fingers until France stepped in. Now French construction companies are hoping to line their pockets with the dividends of peace. Eritrean troops captured the island of Hanish Al-Kubra on 18 December last year following a three-day battle with the Yemeni garrison stationed on the island. A tense stand-off between the two neighbouring countries has been maintained ever since. But thanks to French mediation efforts a new peace accord was proposed last week.

Yemen and Eritrea agreed to submit their dispute over a strategic Red Sea archipelago to international arbitration. The accord stipulates that the two neighbours refrain from using force and urges them to take their dispute to a panel of three judges from the International Court of Justice. The Yemeni ambassador to Egypt, Ahmed Mohamed Luqman, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*, "Yemen is cautiously optimistic and welcomes Eritrea's acceptance of the principle of international arbitration." Luqman

added that Yemen will wait to see whether Eritrea also accepts the result of international arbitration.

Crossed by busy shipping lanes, the Hanish archipelago of some 200 square kilometres is potentially an excellent piece of real estate. The barren volcanic outcrop provides stark panoramic views with much potential for the development of tourism. French construction companies are keeping their fingers crossed, hoping that they will garner plum spoils when they build luxury holiday villages for Saudi and other Gulf Arab holidaymakers. Yemen, as with most other Arabian peninsula nations, is a decidedly dry country. In secular Eritrea, drink flows aplenty in the rapidly developing tourist haunts. The Eritreans, half of whom are Muslim, are not too particular about the modest stipulations of the Islamic dress code. A million unemployed Eritrean ex-combatants, half of them female, cannot afford to pass a chance to work for French hoteliers and Saudi holidaymakers.

"[Peace] is not finalised yet," warned the Eritrean chargé d'affaires in Cairo, Mohamed Ali Amru. "Eritrea refuses to vacate the Hanish archipelago until international arbitration settles the question of sovereignty over the islands."

War politics is a long-entrenched feature of regional rivalries in the Horn of Africa and the southern Arabian peninsula. War politics is embedded in the political structures that combine the inheritance of the liberation struggle for self-determination with the one-party ideologies. There was the war in Dhofar, Oman; the war between the former North and South Yemen; and the ongoing war in Somalia.

As far back as March 1973, America's *Time* magazine reported that Israel occupied one of the Hanish islands, Jebel Zogor, to set up a base for patrols and a relay station. Israel denied *Time*'s report, but Arab states remained sceptical about Israeli denials. This, after all, was the period when the states of the region were gearing up for the Arab-Israeli October war. Meanwhile another war was brewing —

that between the now ruling Eritrean People's Liberation Front and the now vanquished regime of Ethiopian military ruler, Mengistu Haile Mariam. The irony is that the Eritrean fighters who liberated their homeland from Ethiopian rule used the nine Hanish islands as stepping stones to infiltrate the country.

The three main islands of the Hanish archipelago are Jebel Zogor, which covers some 120 square kilometres, Hanish Al-Kubra (68 square kilometres) and Hanish Al-Sughra (barely seven square kilometres). Yemen earlier refused to sit at the negotiating table with Eritrea before the Horn of Africa nation withdrew its troops from the volcanic archipelago.

Before Eritrean independence in May 1993, Ethiopia claimed the Hanish archipelago on the basis of a 1938 British-Italian protocol permitting Italian officials on the archipelago to protect fishermen operating from Eritrean ports. Eritrea was an Italian colony and Britain controlled Aden. Before then, both Yemen and Eritrea had been Ottoman Turkish colonies.

The crux of the matter is that the ownership of the archipelago has never been established under international convention since the days when the disputed islands were an Ottoman possession.

Talaat Hamed, a spokesman of the Arab League in Cairo told the *Weekly*, "[The accord] underlies once again the need to use peaceful means to serve the interests of the brotherly peoples of Yemen and Eritrea." United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Ghali has been pressing the two protagonists to end the dispute and helping France set up this accord which Paris will countersign as a witness. France has invited Egypt and Ethiopia to sign the accord as witnesses as well.

A special French envoy, François Gutmann, has been shuttling between Yemen and Eritrea since 25 January. After meeting Eritrean President Issaias Aferworki in the Eritrean capital Asmara on 25 April, Gutmann talked to Yemen President Ali Abdullah Saleh in Sanaa last Monday.

France is traditionally a major player in the region. It was the colonial power in

nearby Djibouti, which lies immediately to the south of Eritrea. France has a huge military presence in Djibouti, owning a naval and air base there. Djibouti is strategically situated next to busy shipping lanes along which giant oil tankers transport crude oil from the Arab Gulf states to European destinations.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa described the agreement reached through French mediation as an "important accomplishment." Egypt, in conjunction with Ethiopia, has been assisting France in its mediation efforts. "It serves the general interest and the movement towards a peaceful solution in the Yemen-Eritrea crisis," Moussa added.

Observers note that Yemen has been far more enthusiastic about the outcome of French mediation efforts than Eritrea. The question now is whether the conflict will cease to be mainly military and become a political dispute. The answer hinges on whether the West and the Gulf Arab states are willing to finance the development of the region.

'They cannot stop the idea'

The first two works in French philosopher Roger Garaudy's trilogy criticising religious fundamentalism stirred little response. The last of the trilogy, dealing with Zionism, opened a hornet's nest, however, and exposed the 83-year-old writer to a possible prison term. **Amira Howeid** reviews the controversy and talks to Garaudy

France's Gayssot-Fabius Law, which was promulgated in 1990, stipulates that whoever contests the existence of crimes against humanity which are recognised by France or international jurisdiction will be punished by imprisonment for a period ranging between one month and a year and/or fined. The law, however, had never been invoked until French philosopher Roger Garaudy, 83, brought out his latest work *The Founding Myths of Israeli Politics* last month. The book was banned immediately after its publication by Samizdat, an extreme right-wing publishing house which has previously printed anti-Semitic literature.

Originally a Protestant, Garaudy converted to Catholicism and then became a Marxist and a leading member of the French Communist Party. He abandoned Marxism and left the party when he converted to Islam 10 years ago. *The Founding Myths of Israeli Politics* is the third part of a trilogy which presents a critique of fundamentalism in the three monotheistic religions. The first part, entitled *The Greatness and Decadence of Islam*, incensed Muslim clerics for stating that "Islamism is a disease of Islam". It was followed by *Towards a War of Religion*, which criticised Christian fundamentalism. In the third part of the trilogy, Garaudy lists and criticises a number of generally accepted concepts which he considers to be myths — Zionist anti-Semitism, justice in the post-World War II Nuremberg trials, the Holocaust and the Zionist slogan of "a land without a people for a people without a land". He goes on, in the book, to suggest that the powerful Israeli-Zionist lobbies in both the United States and France have perpetuated these myths through political machinations and capitalised on them.

The section of *The Founding Myths of Israeli Politics* which arouses particular controversy is where it questions the objectivity of the documents used at the Nuremberg Nazi trials. Garaudy extensively quotes thinkers who cast doubt on the accuracy of standard accounts of the Holocaust. He mentions a Doctor Kubovy of the Tel Aviv Documentation Centre, who admitted in 1960 that there was no document signed by Adolf Hitler or Gestapo head Heinrich Himmler which speaks of exterminating the Jews. The writer also uses statements made by eye witnesses of the war to further his arguments.

The biggest winners in the Nuremberg trials, says Garaudy, were the Zionists, who claimed to be the sole victims of the war and created the state of Israel. Garaudy makes the point that, "despite the fact that 50 million people were killed in the war, the Zionists made themselves out to be the only ones to have suffered at Hitler's hands and thus placed themselves above and beyond the law in order to legalise all their internal and external actions".

The book also contends that the figure of six million, which is generally accepted as the number of Jews killed in the Nazi Holocaust, is too high. Furthermore, Garaudy argues, the deaths of 17 million Russians and nine million Germans have been reduced to matters of secondary importance, while the suffering of the Jews, however horrific it was, has been endowed with a sacred character denied to others.

Fuel was added to the fire when Garaudy surprised the world by publishing a letter of solidarity addressed to him. At the top of the list of supporters was French Catholic cleric Abbé Pierre, a life-long friend of Garaudy, who argued that "it was time to stop considering the discussion

of what took place during World War II as taboo". Abbé Pierre was accused of being the Trojan Horse for the neo-Nazis and was expelled — together with Garaudy — from the LICRA, a French institute which fights anti-Semitism and other forms of racism.

The cleric is the founder of one of France's most prominent charities and is regarded as a champion of the poor and homeless. He is a well-known public figure, who is respected among Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Abbé Pierre's detractors have tried to link his support for Garaudy to the anti-Semitism which characterised the Catholic Church's relationship with world Jewry during certain historical periods. But the cleric was not deterred. After all, he fought in the French resistance against the Germans and is widely acknowledged to have assisted Jews escaping Nazi persecution.

In a recent interview with the French newspaper *Libération*, Abbé Pierre said that the crimes committed by Israel against the Palestinians could not be justified by referring to the Holocaust. It was "the European Catholic Hitler" who murdered European Jews, he said. "When we wanted to clear our consciences of Hitler's crimes, we chose the easiest solution: expelling the Palestinians from their land."

The French intellectual elite were angered by Garaudy's new book. However, with the entry of Abbé Pierre into the debate, the controversy has been given a new twist. To his detractors the cleric had one thing to say, "I do not aspire to be called the best Frenchman, but only to have God Almighty say to me: 'Pierre, you have been honest'."

Additional reporting from Paris by Hosni Abdel-Rehim



Photo: Nour Sobehi

"While Israel was shelling Lebanon, the French headlines were attacking Father Pierre"

... and Garaudy tells his side of the story

In a telephone interview from his Paris home, Roger Garaudy spoke to Al-Ahram Weekly about his current position and the effect of the publication of his book *The Founding Myths of Israeli Politics* on his life. In an impassioned and sometimes angry tone, Garaudy defended his argument and rejected the accusation of anti-Semitism.

The following are excerpts from the interview:

What exactly is your legal position. Are you facing a jail sentence?

I have been charged, but I haven't been sentenced to prison yet. There will be a trial, however, but I don't know when.

Will you explain the law under which you are being tried?

The law prohibits any questioning of the results of the Nuremberg trial, while the main chapter in my book criticises the trial. However, they consider that it is not possible to discuss the conclusions of the trial and that is why I have now been charged.

Why have you decided only now to publish your book after two previous works criticising

fundamentalism in Islam and Christianity?

The Founding Myths of Israeli Politics is the third part of a trilogy about fundamentalism which I began several years ago.

But why have you made it the last part of your trilogy?

First of all, Judaism — which is a religion — is intentionally confused with Zionism, which is a policy — a tribal, colonial and nationalist policy. This policy has created disorder and chaos and committed real crimes against humanity. A recent example of this is the bombardment of an ambulance in South Lebanon carrying wounded women and children and then the shelling of the United Nations camp in Qana. Those crimes have gone too far and I think this is a good time to publish my work.

How do you explain the growing campaign against you?

I believe that the reason behind the growth of the campaign was to divert the attention of public opinion here from the attacks committed by the Israelis against Lebanon. For instance, the day they bombed the camp, the headline in the biggest paper in France was "The failings of Father Pierre". On the day when Israel bombed the ambulance, the head-

line was "Garaudy's affairs", and so on.

When Peres — the orchestrator of the crime — visited France lately, the headlines were "The LICRA [the French Jewish-dominated society for fighting racism and anti-Semitism] excluded Father Pierre". All this was done to divert attention from the crimes being committed by Israel.

It is believed that your old friendship with Father Pierre was the reason behind his support for you.

Father Pierre supported my views, not out of friendship, but because what I said is the truth. Father Pierre in France is a man who has always dedicated his life to serving good and humane causes.

He spent his whole life without a home and when I explained to him that in Lebanon there are 30,000 people without homes, he intervened. It's not only a question of confidence in me. He actually believes in what he is saying.

How do you plead to the charge that you are anti-Semitic?

I am anti-Zionist. Zionism is a tribal policy and is not related to Judaism, which is a religion. When I was in a concentration camp many years ago, I gave conferences about the prophets of Israel, and all my life, I have been inspired by the lessons of those

prophets. It also seems to me that fighting against Zionism is the best remedy for anti-Semitism, because what nourished it in the first place is precisely the policies of Zionist Israel.

Does this mean that you are against the establishment of Israel?

The establishment of the state of Israel was inspired by its spiritual Zionist father, [Theodor] Herzl, who was inspired by European nationalism and colonialism of the 19th century. Therefore, I do not accept the existence of Israel because it was created by force.

How much does your marriage to a Palestinian sway your views on Israel and the Palestinians?

This is not the point. I wrote books long before I knew personally such and such a Palestinian. When I wrote my book *Palestine: Land of Divine Messages*, I was not related to any Palestinians. This is a personal question and has nothing to do with my views on the Palestinians. It's a question of justice.

On the other hand, I admit that I sympathise with the Palestinians. They were destroyed and tortured by the Israelis. Israel is the invader of the people of Palestine, who had lived in this land for 4,000 years.

Do you believe that Shimon Peres's recent visit

to France has influenced the campaign against you?

Shimon Peres is a war criminal. He committed exactly what are defined as crimes against humanity. As for the effect of his recent visit to France, I don't think that he personally intervened in encouraging the campaign against me, but I am sure that those who were attacking me are agents of Peres and the state of Israel.

Did you expect this to happen?

Yes, of course. This is not the first time. I am used to campaigns. When I wrote my book on Palestine, the bookshops that sold it were threatened to have their windows smashed.

How has your life been after publishing the book?

I received a number of death threats, one of which was during the transmission of a radio programme. But, on the other hand, this gave my book a lot of publicity. It was recently published in the United States, Lebanon, Italy, Germany, Russia and Turkey.

So they cannot stop the idea in the book. They can kill me, they can ban the book, but this will be met with denunciation from all over the world.

Papering over African cracks

Politicians in post-Mao Zedong China have almost ceased to talk about a foreign policy without giving economic matters careful consideration. Rapid Chinese economic growth has made it possible for the People's Republic of China to develop strong commercial links with Africa in the 1990s. "It is impossible to achieve international economic prosperity without the development of Africa," Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen declared in Beijing

on the eve of the ruling Chinese Communist Party chief and President Jiang Zemin's tour of Africa this week. Jiang, the head of the Chinese state, is scheduled to visit Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, Namibia and Zimbabwe between 8 and 22 May.

Qian Qichen had a good point. Recently published World Bank figures show that Africa got less than one per cent — \$2 billion — of an all-time high \$231 billion of foreign investment in the developing world in 1995. South East Asian countries got the lion's share. Western aid to Africa declined by some 12 per cent in 1994. America's aid to the continent is to be slashed by some 30 per cent in 1996 and Britain's aid to Africa is to be reduced by five per cent in 1996-97. African economies suffered from capital flight and an unfavourable investment climate due in part to unstable political conditions. But Taiwan was among the few countries which stepped up aid to Africa precisely at the very moment that Africa's traditional Western donors decided to flee what they saw as the sinking ship of African economic malaise.

It may be too late to rock the years, but we can still look forward to a brighter future in Africa. This is the message that Jiang Zemin wishes to convey during his tour of Africa. This is what Africans want to hear. The Chinese leadership understands that it is economic competitiveness and not political clout that will win them new markets in Africa. But both Africans and the Chinese realise that political clout can be used as a stimulus for trade.

In the not so distant past, Mao's ideological vision of anti-imperialism exercised a powerful influence on the African political scene. Mao's theories of rural-focused development were less popular. In recent years, senior statesman Deng Xiaoping's own vision of economic deregulation has made an indelible mark on Africa. Foreign Minister Qian Qichen rightly pointed out that Africa needs long-term development assistance not short-term emergency relief.

Beijing, adopting the well-tried Taiwanese strategy, has now set aside its old policy of providing grants to cash-strapped African countries and is now stepping up interest-bearing loans to African nations. Taiwan's annual trade with Africa now stands at an impressive \$25 billion. A number of African countries have been bowing to Taiwanese economic and political pressure to

establish full diplomatic relations with Taipei. The People's Republic is trying hard to catch up with its maverick province, and Jiang's tour of Africa is a step in the right direction. China is offering African countries aid and trade with no political strings attached — except perhaps that African states decline Taipei's advances.

The rising Taiwanese star in Africa risks arousing anew old political and ideological passions that have long been smothered elsewhere with the end of the Cold War. Trade and aid are used as political levers by both China and Taiwan. In the past few years, China has failed to match Taiwan's far more generous financial assistance to African nations. There are a number of African countries that have switched allegiances from Beijing to Taipei. Senegal, for instance, established full diplomatic relations with Taipei last January.

Be that as it may, Taiwanese economic clout is a long step away from overturning the old political mantle of Beijing. Most African nations are still partial to Beijing. The centrepiece of the old commercial partnership between Africa and China was undoubtedly the TANZAM railway, which was completed in the 1970s and linked landlocked Zambia's resource-rich copper belt with the Tanzanian Indian Ocean port of Dar es Salaam.

Jiang's tour of Africa is an opportune moment for Africans to re-examine the nature of their relationship with China. The popular prejudices against China in the West sound uncannily similar to those levelled against African governments — usually of the one-party variety — which assure social stability. Both African governments and the Chinese have come under intense pressure and stinging criticism from the West over human rights violations and abuses of power. Many of the African countries that are being visited by President Jiang Zemin — especially Kenya and Zimbabwe — share China's abhorrence of Western exhortations.

It is something of a futile exercise for the West to argue that China must not use its political weight commercially to further its geopolitical goals. Cut-price Chinese goods are flooding African markets. South Africa's imports from the People's Republic amounted to \$1.284 billion in 1994. The respective figure from Taiwan was \$2,604 million. South Africa exported \$585 million worth of goods to China and \$1,817 million worth to Taiwan in 1994. Clearly, the People's Republic is no match for Taiwan. But China's star as the economic dynamo of the 21st century is fast rising.

However, as the relationship between Africa and China undergoes rapid and profound change, one paradox remains unresolved. South Africa, the continent's economic powerhouse, maintains full diplomatic relations with Taipei — and not Beijing. This diplomatic anachronism is a legacy of the apartheid years. South African President Nelson Mandela paid a state visit to Taiwan last year — he has never set foot in the People's Republic — and his foreign minister, Alfred Nzo, was in Taipei earlier this year. Nzo also visited Beijing just before he came to Cairo to sign the African Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaty. Nevertheless, "there is a Chinese representative office in Johannesburg rendering full diplomatic functions and consular services," explained Anthea Joubert, of the South African Embassy in Cairo. "The Chinese interest office is called the Chinese Cultural Centre in South Africa, and there is a similar South African Cultural Centre in Beijing. The Taiwanese, on the other hand, have a full-fledged diplomatic mission in Pretoria."

South Africa is not among the African countries to be visited by President Jiang Zemin. The African National Congress toed the Moscow line, while Beijing supported the Pan-African Congress of Azania.

The South African Chinese community is some 100,000-strong. They are mainly from the Chinese mainland, but other Chinese of Hong Kong and Taiwanese extraction have moved into the country in the past few years. The first influx of ethnic Chinese came

Chinese President Jiang Zemin tours Africa this week, rekindling the old flames of friendship but abandoning grants in favour of interest-bearing loans, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**



in the early 1920s to work as labourers when South Africa's railway infrastructure was being built. Today, they are mainly traders and financiers. Most large South African cities have a thriving Chinatown.

Taiwan is a trading nation par excellence. Taiwanese exports and imports accounted for 74 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) in 1994. Tiny Taiwan ranked 12th in the league of the world's largest trading nations. It exported \$92.9 billion worth of goods last year. The comparable figure for China was \$121 billion. The 21 million Taiwanese had a GDP per capita of \$11,500 in 1994. Taiwan's per capita income is 20 times as high as the People's Republic. Last year, Taiwan's GDP stood at \$241 billion, while China, with some 1,300 million people, had a GDP of \$630 billion. But the Taiwanese have a lot of faith in China's rapidly liberalising economy. Taiwanese investment in China stood at \$4.6 billion by the end of 1994.

What does all this mean for Africa? The ambassador of Niger in Cairo, Mamane Oumou, whose country was the first to ditch Beijing in favour of Taipei three years ago, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Taiwan was a far more important trading partner and aid donor than the People's Republic. "Poor countries, like Niger, are denied the opportunity to have good relations with all countries. They are often unfairly forced to choose between two valuable friends," he noted. Niger's decision to recognise Taipei set a precedent in the 1990s among the impoverished Francophone countries of West Africa's Sahel belt.

The Malian ambassador to Egypt, Allayé Alphy Cissé, was adamant that despite the fact that Mali's neighbours — Senegal to the west and Niger to the east — had severed diplomatic ties with the People's Republic in favour of Taiwan, Mali would continue to have excellent working relations with Beijing. "The Chinese built an ultra-modern international conference centre in the Malian capital Bamako in 1995. Mali and China have numerous joint-venture projects, especially in agriculture, sugar production, pharmaceutical products and textiles," Cissé told the *Weekly*.

The Chinese fund such projects and they are built with Chinese technical expertise. Still, many African nations are beginning to tire of Chinese sports stadiums and other white elephants.

The Senegalese ambassador to Egypt, Hassan Bassirou Diouf, was more forthcoming. "We recently decided to recognise the Republic of China [Taiwan]," he said. "We have extensive trade links with Taiwan. We still do business with Beijing. The Chinese have not yet evacuated their embassy in Dakar. But Beijing has notified us that it will do so in due course."

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El-Fayed's calling

Is Mohamed El-Fayed, trying to be Britain's answer to America's Ross Perot? **Abdallah Abdel-Salam** reports from London

The British daily *The Independent* recently published on its front page a report stating that Mohamed El-Fayed, the Egyptian owner of London's most famous department store, Harrods, was secretly planning to establish a political party. The new party would aim, the report read, to reform the British constitutional system. Twenty-three million pounds sterling are said to have been earmarked by El-Fayed for candidates of the prospective Reform Party during the forthcoming parliamentary elections, due in the first half of next year.

A statement issued by El-Fayed's offices denied he had such plans and claimed that the *Independent* had been referring to a proposal under study by British constitution experts. Nonetheless, it is clear that El-Fayed has political ambitions which he is willing to submit for public discussion in Britain. The British political system, which was once impermeable to tycoons, has — like Italy and the United States — become more responsive to them. Sir James Goldsmith, the billionaire who recently set up the Referendum Party, is a good example of the phenomenon.

But how can someone who does not have British nationality establish a political party in Britain? Mansur Malek, a British lawyer who has specialised in matters relating to immigration and political asylum, explained, "Anyone who obtains full residence in Britain is entitled to vote and to exercise political rights including the right to establish political parties," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. El-Fayed enjoys full residence rights in Britain.

Mohamed El-Fayed and his two brothers, Ali and Salah, came under the spotlight of the British media in the early eighties. The Fayed brothers had a conflict with a businessman called Tiny Roland over the purchase of the House of Fraser group, which consists of 59 stores in addition to Harrods. While the Fayed brothers won the deal, Roland, the owner of the weekly *Observer*,

launched defamatory campaigns against the brothers on the pages of his newspaper. The battle intensified in 1989, to the extent that *The Observer* published a special issue in March of that year devoted entirely to the discussion of the Fayed case.

The Fayed brothers enjoyed the unquestionable support of the Conservatives under the leadership of former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. The brothers gave generous contributions to the party, a fact which led Tiny Roland to accuse the Tories of compromising the requirements for the conclusion of the Harrods deal.

However, the Fayed brothers' relationship with the Tories deteriorated after Thatcher and a number of confrontations with top party members took place. Mohamed is still struggling to obtain British nationality, though he has lived in England for 30 years.

Dy Safia Safwat, a Sudanese legal consultant practising in London, explained that when an application for nationality is refused, no reasons are normally given. From the legal standpoint, nationality is a gift not a right and, therefore, no authority can compel the Home Office to grant British nationality to a person who was not born in Britain.

According to Safwat, information leaked from the Immigration Office attributes the refusal to grant nationality to El-Fayed to the confrontations which have taken place between him and the Tory government during the past two years. El-Fayed himself does not deny that there are conflicts, and from time to time he attacks the government. In an interview with the *Daily Telegraph*, he charged that 75 per cent of the Conservative members of the House of Commons were corrupt and that the house had become a "backstage" facility: the one who pays gets what he wants rapidly.

Michael Cole, the Fayed's spokesman, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that divulging the names of corrupt members of parliament had turned the Tory government against Mohamed. The Conservatives

have not forgotten that El-Fayed forced former Trade Minister Neil Hamilton to resign when the businessman produced evidence to show that Hamilton compromised his government position by staying at the El-Fayed-owned Ritz Hotel in Paris free of charge.

Mohamed El-Fayed's political agenda, Cole told the *Weekly*, was merely to establish an independent trust to explore and study ideas for constitutional reforms in Britain. El-Fayed would not play any role in the new organisation except financing its activities.

El-Fayed, in his reply to the *Independent's* claims, admitted that he was personally concerned with promoting certain political ideas, including a new Bill of Rights, legislation for the freedom of information and the abolition of the House of Lords and the establishment of an elected council in its place.

Professor Peter Walters, a lecturer in political science at Liverpool University, told the *Weekly*, "It seems amazing that during the past few months, the British political field has witnessed the rise of James Goldsmith, who established the Referendum Party to urge the British to reject uniting under a European flag and to propagate the slogan 'Yes for London, no for Brussels', and El-Fayed, who is proposing ideas to reform the constitution." A trend has emerged for businessmen to seek to play a direct role in politics in Britain, and Walters emphasised the novelty of this phenomenon. While there were cases in the past of businessmen attempting to influence the political establishment, he said, they were mostly assimilated, particularly by the Tories.

El-Fayed is no stranger to political ambitions. He has tried on several occasions to buy the *Today* and *The Observer* newspapers, as well as a radio station, but each time the government exerted pressure on the owners to prevent media organs coming under his influence. El-Fayed does, however, own the satirical magazine *Punch*.



London-based tycoon Mohamed El-Fayed

May Day roundup

North

PARIS: Waving banners against immigration, European integration and President Jacques Chirac, about 12,000 far-right supporters marched through the French capital on the traditional labour day. With unemployment pushing 12 per cent, weak unions and modernisation threatening many jobs, polls indicate growing disaffection with France's traditional parties.

Meanwhile the popularity of the extreme right-wing National Front is on the rise. The marches consisted mostly of middle-aged and elderly people, particularly war veterans and people from depressed rural areas. Demonstrators called on the government to expel immigrants from France.

MOSCOW: Election politics dominated May Day marches, with Russian President Boris Yeltsin and communist rival, Gennady Zyuganov, each rallying about 10,000 supporters six weeks before the presidential polls.

Yeltsin urged independent trade unionists carrying blue flags to "help citizens to take the right decisions" in the 16 June elections, while less than two kilometres away Zyuganov told his supporters, amid a sea of red Soviet flags and portraits of Lenin, that any postponement of the polls would trigger civil war.

Many state workers and pensioners have not been paid for months. The communist supporters include many angered by the government's failure to pay salaries and benefits and to stop production plummeting.

Several other ex-Soviet republics largely abandoned May Day festivities, but thousands turned out at rallies in Armenia, Belarus and Ukraine.

BERLIN: Workers demonstrated against the government's proposed overhaul of the welfare state, protesting most strongly at plans to reduce sick pay. The head of the German Federation of Trade Unions told 20,000 demonstrators at Berlin's City Hall that if the government and industry were looking for a fight "they will find our clenched fists".

In Berlin, leftists and neo-Nazis organised their own May Day demonstrations. Protesters threw stones and bottles at police during a demonstration of some 9,000 leftists in eastern Berlin. Clashes left 48 policemen injured in the city.

TOKYO: Some 2.1 million Japanese workers joined rallies nationwide to declare war on record unemployment, as the country battles to lift itself out of its worst post-war recession.

Some 1,100 May Day events took place across Japan, but most were held in a festive mood with participants attracted more by rock'n'roll concerts and comedy shows than worker solidarity.

South

NEW DELHI: Trade union officials in the country's communist citadel of Calcutta said workers' processions would not be held, in line with an Election Commission ban. Seventeen states and federal territories voted in the second round of India's national elections.

Celebrations normally draw tens of thousands to the city's Chowringhee area, amid fiery speeches and colourful portraits of Marx and Lenin.

BEIJING: There were no top-level celebrations, but 100,000 Chinese workers, farmers, soldiers, students and children from all parts of the country flocked to Tiananmen Square, to watch the ceremony of raising the national flag.

SEOUL: Some 15,000 trade union militants staged a May Day march urging the South Korean government to ease restrictions on organised labour and to let unions take up political activities.

SWAZILAND: More than 40,000 Swazi workers turned up at a rally in an industrial town in the east of the country to celebrate the tiny southern African kingdom's first official May Day holiday.

Swazi King Mswati III, who rules by decree, reluctantly agreed to make May Day a public holiday. It is, however, an unpaid one, much to the anger of workers who have been demanding that King Mswati reinstate the constitution suspended by his father King Sobhuza in 1973.

MEXICO CITY: For the second year running, the government and unions opted not to hold traditional May Day parades due to economic constraints. But thousands of workers independently took to the streets in peaceful marches to demonstrate against government economic policies.

DAR ES SALAAM: Tanzania President Benjamin Mkapa raised the minimum wage from \$20 to \$30 a month and ordered a general pay rise for all workers in the country.

Compiled by Heba Samir

Just a disaster for the Tories

The British Conservative Party last week experienced its second worst local election defeat ever. **Faiza Rady** looks at how the newly rejuvenated Labour Party is winning over former Tory voters in England

In the wake of Conservative Party's loss of 573 city council seats in British local government elections on 3 May, the tabloid press screamed Prime Minister John Major's downfall in their banner headlines. "Poll-Axed" proclaimed the *Daily Express*, while the *Sun* triumphantly chirped, "You're Gone John". Gone, in fact, were half the seats the Conservatives were defending, as well as highly symbolic Tory strongholds like traditionally Thatcherite Basildon and Peterborough, home of party chairman Brian Mawhinney.

"Conservatives were also stung by a wipe-out on 30 councils, leaving a total of 50 — one in nine — without any Tory councillors. Big cities, including Oxford, Manchester and Newcastle, as well as southern new towns such as Slough and Harlow, are now 'Tory-free' zones," wrote the *Guardian*.

Ivor Crewe, vice-chancellor of Essex University, somewhat mitigated the tabloids' expression of gloom. "They are not as disappointed as they should be," he said. "They were expecting catastrophe, and all they got was disaster." Analysts had shown that the Conservatives' results on 3 May would translate into 28 per cent of the vote in a general election — two points up on last year's projection.

Addressing the "disaster", John Major — like Crewe — looked on the bright side: the vote was not the worst, but only the second worst Conservative defeat in local elec-

tion history. The prime minister summarily downplayed Labour's gains at the polls by dismissing the political relevance of local elections when compared to general elections. "People have, for as far back as you can go since the second world war, chosen by-elections and local council elections to protest against the government of the day," he explained. The low voter turnout of 30 per cent on 3 May, compared with 46 per cent in the 1991 general election and 78 per cent in the last general election, seemed to prove Major's point. Referring to the high rate of voter absenteeism, he said: "There are millions and millions of people who will go out and vote Conservative at the next general election who chose not to do so yesterday." He further deflated the Labour victory by pointing out that its share of the vote had actually declined from 21 per cent in last year's local elections to 16 per cent this year.

Labour called Major's surface confidence "arrogant in the face of disaster", and celebrated their 464 seat gains and control of 210 councils. Proclaiming a ground-breaking victory, analysts stressed that election issues had gone beyond local politics. "These elections are important because in very few constituencies are local issues at stake,"

wrote Anne Applebaum, a columnist for the *Evening Standard*. "In almost every one the main issue is the prime minister, the party and the government." Labour leader Tony Blair described the results as "excellent for new Labour and spectacularly bad for the Conservatives", who were able only to "scratch for the odd piece of statistical comfort". Labour cadres were especially fired up as many traditionally Tory constituencies switched to Labour, leading Blair to conclude that "steadily and surely we are building the bond of trust with the people".

Having lost all major legislative elections to the Tories since 1979, Labour has good reason to celebrate this victory. Many analysts believe that the party's marginalisation was due to a gradual and consistent erosion of its union-based blue-collar constituency. During the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher successfully engaged in large-scale union-busting, while relocating entire sectors of Britain's manufacturing industry to Southern countries — which are endowed with a cheap and unprotected workforce.

The Labour Party lost its most important base when the industrial and building sectors fired 40 per cent of their workers; indeed, by the end of the '80s, these two sectors

employed only 25 per cent of the entire workforce. Confronted with a new generation of mostly white-collar service workers with a different culture and class background, the party no longer spoke the language of its constituency. At this point, Labour faced a real dilemma: aligning its position too closely with the prevailing neo-liberal ideology would further erode their traditional blue-collar support, but the conventional socialist discourse alienated the "new" working class. "The attempt to juggle these tendencies resulted in the most confused and muddled definition of the party's political perspective and platform," wrote economist François Poirier.

Hence Labour restructured itself, redefining its basic tenets. As early as 1985, the party admitted that most trade-union bargaining rights had been irremediably lost to Thatcherism. Between '87 and '90, leading cadres accepted the privatisation of major state enterprises by scrapping the nationalisation clause from their platform. But it was really with Tony Blair's nomination to the leadership in 1994 that the revisionist trend accelerated. Blair sought to project the "new Labour" image by discarding the old leftist principles.

Thus the economic definition of

socialism as the "collective ownership of the means of production and exchange" and the class reference to the workers' movement, as represented in the party's affiliation with the trade unions, were challenged. In the April '95 Labour Party conference, members overwhelmingly voted to reduce the economic definition of socialism to the loose objective of seeking "social justice", while the executive party commission limited trade-union representation to the party conference. Moreover, Tony Blair's revamped "neo-Labour Party" carefully avoided any direct references to social inequalities in its frantic efforts to capture the middle-class vote. Sociologist Marc Lazar explains that the party finally reached mainstream voters by adopting a kind of populist Christian socialist strategy with strong Conservative overtones. By acknowledging that the welfare state had finally become redundant and focusing on individual responsibility, the Labour discourse of the '90s in effect merged with the dominant neo-liberal position.

But how does this "in" Labour-speak address Britain's increasingly disenfranchised working class? While it is true that upward mobility for young professionals is still the norm, economist John Grieve

Smith has documented how high unemployment levels and "flexible" employment — a euphemism for low-paid, part-time temporary jobs — have caused the number of poor people to triple since the early '80s. Life expectancy for the poor is now eight years below the national average. And between '75 and '92, the purchasing power of the lowest income bracket, which includes 10 per cent of all male workers, decreased in real terms. Moreover, social service budget slashes, which principally affect the working class, coupled with Conservative fiscal policies, increased absolute poverty. While unemployment compensation was adjusted to family size and needs before Thatcherism, the reformed Conservative package allocates a fixed compensation rate, regardless of the number of family dependents.

The dire material conditions of the British poor have induced Oxfam — an organisation which assists impoverished Third World nations — to start an anti-poverty programme in Britain last year. To justify his decision, Oxfam's director explained that with 14 million people with incomes below the national average and one out of four families requiring some form of welfare assistance, Britain needed to follow the survival strategy of Southern communities. Whether Tony Blair's reconstructed Labour Party can address this crisis at the political level remains an open question.



Italians reject the right

Italy has just voted in a left-of-centre government for the first time in 50 years. **Sayed Awad** analyses the election results

These are exciting, if somewhat uncertain, times for Italy as it holds the presidency of the European Union. The 55th government in Italy's post-World War II history promises to be the most left-wing in Italy's contemporary history. The upper and lower houses of the Italian parliament are now both controlled by the Olive Tree coalition — an unprecedented victory for Italy's left. Romano Prodi, head of a centrist party which forms part of the coalition, has been designated prime minister by President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro this month.

The Olive Tree won 319 of the 630 seats in the lower house of parliament, or Chamber of Deputies, and 167 of the 315 seats in the upper house, or Senate. Umberto Bossi's Northern League, which wants an autonomy for the prosperous northern regions of Italy, secured 59 seats in the chamber and 27 seats in the senate, while the right-of-centre Freedom Alliance's tally was 246 and 117.

Massimo D'Alema, leader of the Olive Tree's biggest branch, the Democratic Party of the Left, obtained fewer votes than Enrico Berlinguer, veteran leader of the former Italian Communist Party, used to get in general elections a decade or two ago. But D'Alema today is ca-

pable of forming a coalition government with other left-wing parties — a feat that forever eluded Berlinguer. The Democratic Party of the Left is the largest spin-off from the now defunct Italian Communist Party.

The Democratic Party of the Left still has the hammer and sickle on its emblem, but it adopted a watered-down version of Marxism in the aftermath of the collapse of the former Soviet Union. The party modelled itself on the British Labour Party and lies a fair distance to the right of the hardline Communist Refoundation, which gave the Olive Tree an overall majority by adding its votes to the coalition. The Communist Refoundation, another offshoot of the former Communist Party, wants to reintroduce the *scala mobile* system, which links pay rises to inflation.

Communism is not dead in Italy, but neither is capitalism or fascism for that matter. The two biggest personalities in the Freedom Alliance are Silvio Berlusconi, its leader, and Gianfranco Fini. Leader of the neo-fascist National Alliance, Fini, who was predicted to collect a larger share of the vote than he did, was one of the biggest losers in the elections. Media tycoon Berlusconi, the leader of the Forza Italia Party

and a former prime minister, performed badly as well. He will be spending the next few months — maybe years — in and out of court on corruption charges such as that of bribing tax inspectors.

Outgoing Prime Minister Lamberto Dini and his new Italian Renewal party — another Olive Tree member — got a puny 4.3 per cent of the vote. Dini's major shortcoming was that he failed to give Italian voters a solid government. His coalition was shaky and important decisions could not be taken.

Can Prodi now provide the long awaited answer to Italy's political conundrum? Prodi, widely considered to be economically sophisticated and fiscally responsible, has many difficult tasks to accomplish in the next few months. Italy's unemployment rate stands at 13 per cent. Italy's public debt amounts to 125 per cent of its gross national product. But the Mediterranean country still has a standard of living higher than Britain's, a population bigger than France's and an economy that is still one of the world's most dynamic.

Edited by Gamal Nkrumah

Fait accompli?

With less than three weeks to go until the elections, Peres has a lot on his mind. Aside from the fact that he faces strong opposition from the Likud Party, which is reeling in votes with the promise of continuing the policy of establishing settlements, he was recently targeted in a UN report on the Qana massacre.

In response to charges lodged in the report that Israel was made aware of the presence of Lebanese civilians in the UN compound, Peres has found it effective to blame the UN for allegedly not having informed him of the presence of refugees. But what of the fact that he had no business bombing a UN compound in the first place, whether or not Hezbollah guerrillas were hiding out there?

Given Israel's repeated assertion that its security interests precede all else, the answer obviously is that this issue was inconsequential, as perhaps were the lives of over 100 Lebanese civilians.

The same can be said about the ongoing final status negotiations. When presented in February with an agreed summary of the issues to be discussed during the settlement talks, Peres rejected them outright. "Who says there must be a Palestinian state," he asked in a recent interview. The Palestinians would be the first to come to mind, with Israeli negotiators in Taba coming in at a close second.

They are singing a different song from Peres', but then again, they are not campaigning. Ron Pundak, a senior Peres aide who is in charge of the final status talks on Jerusalem, recently said, "In three years, if all goes well, a Palestinian state will emerge... and why would Jerusalem not be its capital?" Apparently, Pundak and his entourage are willing to tackle this issue, but is Peres?

The answer would probably lean more towards the affirmative than not. However, any clear, positive signs are painfully absent from the comments he has made in several recent interviews. This may simply be a defense mechanism or publicity play while on the campaign trail, but when it comes to a ticklish issue such as Palestinian sovereignty and Arab-Israeli peace process, it is a dangerous gambit. What Palestinian would want to bet on a future shrouded in a possible maybe?

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The desert within

In the 1950s, pan-Arabism began to acquire Manichean overtones, writes **Lutfi El-Kholi**. Arab nationalists became entrenched in an all-out battle of good against evil. Geography and history have conspired against the formation of a unified Arab nation: what are the alternatives?

An attempt to read objectively the current state of the Arab world brings to light three essential aspects. The first, discussed in a previous article, related to the spirit of pan-Arab unity and the drive to unification. This spirit was, in thought, feeling and action, more profound and more dynamic during the period of colonial rule, despite its divisive tyranny, than during the entire post-independence period that witnessed the creation of the Arab League. For nearly fifty years now, the Arab world has been debilitated by the incapacity to organize collective action and to take the initiative in responding to the problems of the Arab community, both at home and abroad. In short, a prevalent weakness has developed, and appears to have acquired all the symptoms of a chronic disease.

The second aspect which emerges from this reading, and which may go some way towards explaining the organic causes of the weakness, relates to topography. Topography has posed, and continues to pose, an insurmountable physical and psychological obstacle, not only to pan-Arab unity, but to effective and long-lasting interaction between the various Arab parties in a manner that both promotes joint interests and fosters a communal vision and a collective will.

In other words, the fact that 85 to 90 per cent of the total land surface of the Arab world is desert impedes uninterrupted social, economic and cultural interaction. The geography of the Arab world does not form a continuum from the west (the Maghreb) to the east (the Mashreq); instead, the Arab countries, which supposedly embody the communal will, are scattered oases, each an island unto itself, in a vast expanse of desert. From pre-Islamic times to the post-independence era, pan-Arabism as an ideology, as cultural dynamism and political action, has repeatedly come up against the silent, barren expanses of sand which enclose Arab countries within their isolated shells.

In his recent work, *Arab Politics and the Implications of the Nation-State*, the well-known Bahraini scholar Dr Mohamed Jaber Al-Ansari, writes: "The lifeless desert spaces have prevented the emergence in the Arab world of an organic communal fabric with a single, integrated cycle of interaction that would constitute the synthetic force of society in a single, permanent and self-perpetuating Arab nation, from the distant past to the present day. The intervening desert, with its inherent spirit of alienation and estrangement, was the natural environment in which the distant and diverse tribal, sectarian and regional disparities evolved, over time, into distinct (socio-political) entities."

This is remarkably ironic. The Arab world occupies a uniquely strategic corner of the globe. It is, one might say, at the heart of the world, spanning Africa and Asia, facing Europe across the Mediterranean and overlooking the Americas via the Atlantic. Yet the Arabs have rarely been able to turn this incomparable strategic advantage to their benefit, particularly during the period that followed national independence and the creation of the Arab League. This applies as much to political and security matters (the Arab-Israeli struggle) as it does to the pursuit of economic interests (as a dominant influence at the crossroads of international economic and commercial relations).

The reason? For generations before the current revolution in communications technology, the arid topography of this region has separated the centres of civilization within it, prevented mutual influence and the exchange of expertise, and given rise to profound, and sometimes antagonistic, regional political, economic and cultural disparities. Simultaneously, it generated varying degrees of a cultural schizophrenia which set Bedouin tribalism against urban metropolitanism. The

tribalism metaphor is clear, and is valid to this day: the exclusive narrow-mindedness, the aversion to change and innovation (regardless of whether the tent is replaced by the house and the camel supplanted by the car), which surrounds and sometimes violently encroaches upon the oases of sophistication and open-mindedness, unwilling to let them rest until progress has been hindered.

While these conflicting values have always existed side by side, from the level of socio-political systems to that of individual psychology, the atmosphere generated by the desert topography of the region has been generally inimical to the spirit of modernism. As a result, we find that, throughout the course of Arab history, the closed spirit of tribal parochialism has ultimately gained the upper hand.

It is true that Islam, when it was first propagated throughout the region, allowed civilization to triumph over tribalism. Before four centuries had passed, however, the Arab Muslims had begun to reject the spirit of modernity, reverting to various forms of ethnic fanaticism, ideological bigotry and religious partisanship. The political, intellectual and religious inflexibility that evolved gave rise, over time, to a panoply of political forces, expressing nationalist, fundamentalist, or socialist ideologies, all of which were driven to a greater or lesser extent by this desert austerity.

It is also true that the Zionists' first defeat of the Arabs, the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, the boom in oil wealth and the massive human, social and economic movement that this generated, either within the petrol-exporting nations or between them and other Arab countries, and the revolutionary advances in transportation and communications technology gave the rising tide of pan-Arabism the historic opportunity to transcend the disadvantages of desert topography in order to resolve the age-old conflict between tribal and metropolitan mentalities.

This potential remained unfulfilled, however, due to the problems which resulted from the economics of the petrol industry, the war with Israel, the dictates of economic development and the politics of the Cold War. The Arab mind, torn between tribalism and modernism, was unable to contend with these problems in a unified framework of common interest, and to maintain a healthy balance between individual national and pan-Arab identities.

Rational dialogue, conducted in the corridors of the Arab League, could have translated into practical projects such as economic unity and the common Arab market; instead, sharp ideological conflicts erupted, fuelled by a Bedouin fanaticism which demanded an instant solution at any price and regardless of the realistic demands of the situation. Right-wing, left-wing, progressive, reactionary, Muslim, nationalist, Sunni, Shi'ite, Baathist, Nasserist — every camp bared its teeth and dug in its heels, waving the banners of its label overhead. Not an inch was yielded; there was no common ground. Any compromise in the interest of unity was automatically ruled out. The forces of rationalism and modernity retreated before rampant fanaticism; the intractable desert crept inexorably closer to the oases of civilisation. One morning we awoke to the maelstrom of the Gulf War.

Geography is nothing but barren land, until human energies and ingenuity bring it life and history. This brings us to the crucial question. Can the Arabs work for the Arabs? Can the Arabs transform the lethal desert within them into fertile soil before it is too late? The battle of modernity against tribalism, materially and psychologically, has become the pivot for the project of national resurrection. Victory in this battle implies providing the practical bases for the development of common interests within a diverse framework. Only when this is achieved can

we mobilise the massive intellectual, political, economic and scientific energies which have remained inert to this day, each confined to its respective field, in order to build a tangible, not merely conceptual, edifice for the pursuit of common Arab interests. This edifice, in turn, will govern the quality of inter-Arab relations. As the tangible embodiment of the spirit of rationalism, it will raise the most formidable defense against the reckless ideological adventurism that, with more or less vehemence, springs up from time to time, in the guise of "fundamentalism", "nationalism", or "progressivism".

Yet it would be unrealistic to expect that the discourse which currently governs inter-Arab relations will lead to this victory. Since the beginning of the second half of this century, pan-Arab ideology, in theoretical and political discourse, has undergone a palpable transformation. No longer does it operate within the framework of a critical, empirical interpretation of history as the guide for democratic popular action. Rather, it has acquired a prescriptive didacticism that has virtually lost touch with reality and entered, with almost missionary zeal, the realm of millenarian mysticism.

The project of a single Arab nation, containing all Arab countries within a unified political entity, defeated by centuries of complicity and treachery, is awaiting its second coming. It has become the "sacred mission" of the post-World War II generations to see the realisation of this project. The second world war was an historic juncture which brought the Arabs one more time face to face with "destiny". In its wake, the state of Israel was forcibly implanted in the region and the Arab countries, weak and divided.

In other words, the ideology of pan-Arabism has become a panacea. Comprehensive unity signified the "resurrection" of the "eternal mission of the Arab nation" that would guide liberation movements, feed the hungry, restore honour, exact revenge for Israel's crimes, and bring progress and prosperity to a torn, fragmented Arab people and their weak and crumbling governments. Animosity toward the nation-state (in the Maghreb's pan-Arabist discourse) or the region-state (in the literature of the Arab Mashreq) has become holy writ for the various pan-nationalist organisations. Any sacrifice, however costly, can be justified through references to zeal for conquest of the ideal — as though "destiny" had sided with "its nation" to bring it victory.

Since the 1950s, the pan-Arab movement has been dominated by this millenarian credo. This is manifested in the fiery slogans and ideological tracts, which can be quickly read and interpreted as you please, and in a selective, romantic rendering of the past to serve as a model for what the Arab nation should be like in the future. It also happens to be far removed from the reality in which we live and which is full of problems and issues of a completely different nature. It appears that the door to innovative thinking has been closed. The philosophy of pan-Arabism has retreated into a shell of rigid, glorified revivalism; it has no time to waste on critical analysis and empirical study.

Yet, is the culture of pan-Arabism — and not the pan-Arab movement — impoverished? Quite the contrary. Valuable and creative scholarly endeavours have been contributed to its evolution by a plethora of Arab thinkers, both medieval and modern. The problem is that, since the mid-fifties, the pan-Arab movement has lost touch with this vast heritage and with the spirit of academic inquiry it represents.

But how was the spirit of objectivity replaced by the dreams of idealists? Reality was once critically assessed; in the '50s and '60s, a holy war was waged on the national, considered "anomalous" in the greater Arab entity.

The transformation is probably a manifestation of the rupture of victory felt throughout the Arab world when the Suez Canal was nationalised in 1956. This was not merely a victory against the West in general — it was an unprecedented economic and political victory for an Arab country over one of the world's largest multi-national corporations, one of the giants which were attempting to tighten their grip on the international economy.

Egypt's political victory during the Tripartite Invasion of 1958 — its actual military defeat notwithstanding — augmented this thrill. Abdel-Nasser, practically unknown three years previously, was elevated to the stature of a legendary hero, willing to enter into battle against the mightiest foes. At the time, many nationalist leaders, particularly those of Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, said of Abdel-Nasser that he had demonstrated his heroism in the fight against Zionist forces in Palestine in 1948; it was, therefore, no coincidence that "on that pure Arab soil" he conceived his plans for the "blessed" revolution of July 1952. His success, according to the pan-Arab perspective, was the first sign of the Arab come-back after the defeat of 1948.

In *Philosophy of the Revolution*, Nasser mentions that his ancestors were the Arab tribe of Beni Murr, who migrated from the Arabian Peninsula to Upper Egypt. As such, he was no longer an ordinary man, the product of his time and place. He became a far larger being: the hidden saviour of Arab nationalism who had returned at last, a latter-day Saladin waging war against Egypt's enemies — the modern crusaders — Zionism and Western imperialism. When, in 1958, he "saved" Syria from the clutches of its enemies at home and abroad, by becoming the leader of the UAR, the first unification of Arab countries in modern history, his status as the leader of pan-Arabism was further entrenched. The UAR consisted only of two countries: but, to pan-Arabists, it was the first nail in the coffin of a system of separate nation-states.

The transition had taken place within the space of two years. The "single Arab nation" and its "leader" merged into a metaphysical creed in which the struggle for unity was played out in the realm of myth and legend. The creed had bred a passionate zeal, and had created its own heresy: the nation-state.

Perhaps these characteristics of post-1956 pan-Arabist thought and action help to explain certain subsequent events that appear somehow self-contradictory. They explain, for example, why the Arab Baath Party in Syria — the first political manifestation of modern pan-Arabism — agreed to dissolve itself in 1958 according to the conditions Nasser had stipulated. After all, the legendary hero of the Arab rebirth had set the conditions. There was no way the Baath Party could counter with an alternative proposal that may have been more democratic.

They also explain why the Baathists in Syria, who had joined the opposition to the UAR less than a year after its creation, rallied behind the pan-Arabists' condemnation of Nasser in 1961 when he chose not to use force against the separatist movement in Syria, although he had already deployed advanced forces to combat it, and instead accepted Syria's withdrawal from the union.

Metaphysical mythology has dominated the pan-Arab movement since the 1950s, pitting the forces of good — the pan-Arab entity — against the evil nation-state which conspires to usurp the greater Arab nation's pre-ordained right to reconstitute itself and to restore Arab pride and honour. Yet two questions remain: has a unified Arab state, geographically and politically congruous to the area in which Arab culture manifests itself, ever existed in history? And when history and contemporary realities are taken into account, is the nation-state really inimical to Arab unity?

Challenging Israel's myths

Much of the credit in rousing international public opinion against the appalling Qana massacre must go to CNN, whose extensive coverage of the tragedy included harrowing images of Lebanese civilians torn apart by the brutal Israeli attack on the UN inspection post where they had taken refuge. Having said that, however, one can only wonder at the sense of timing which led CNN to devote its prime viewing slot that same evening to a screening of Steven Spielberg's documentary, *Survivors of the Holocaust*. The only possible explanation is that it was an attempt to temper the impact of Israeli atrocities by reminding viewers of Jewish suffering at the hands of the Nazis.

In the event, the incident is just another salvo in the psychological war the West is waging to consecrate certain symbols of Jewish persecution as sacrosanct. Indeed, given the deep feelings of guilt that the West harbours towards the Jews, this promises to remain an important arena of psychological warfare in future. Among the most invidious of these symbols is the figure of six million cited as the number of Jewish victims of the Holocaust, not least because it is used to justify Israel's legitimacy as a state.

While there is no doubt that Hitler exterminated huge numbers of Jews in concentration camps like Auschwitz, Buchenwald and Dachau (allegedly four million), they were not the only group, ethnic or otherwise, to be thus targeted. Gypsies, Serbs at the hands of Croat Fascists (the Ustasas) and Communists from various countries suffered the same fate.

Since the end of World War II, Israeli Nazi-hunters like Simon Wiesenthal have relentlessly hunted down former Nazi criminals wherever they happened to be, using all available means, legal or otherwise, to smoke them out of hiding. However, no thorough investigation of the six million figure was ever undertaken. Although the figure is more an assessment based on the stories told by the survivors of these camps than the result of a systematic enquiry, an assessment made at the emotionally charged moment when the camps were liberated and the pitiful plight of their survivors revealed,

French philosopher Roger Garaudy is being prosecuted for daring to challenge a claim Israel considers untouchable. **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** discusses the issue

any researcher who dared dispute it was immediately branded an anti-Semite, a racist and a Fascist.

A few years ago, the eminent American scholar, Noam Chomsky, himself a Jew, was vilified for writing an introduction to a book which, while admitting that the Jews had suffered intolerable persecution at the hands of the Nazis, questioned the validity of the six million figure. Today it is the turn of the well-known French intellectual, Roger Garaudy, who recently published a book under the title *Les Mythes Fondamentaux de la Politique Israelienne*, in which he presents strong evidence to suggest that the number of Jews actually exterminated in the camps is closer to one million than four million.

In the ensuing outcry, Garaudy became the victim of a smear campaign designed to cast doubts on his credibility. Much was made of his "flightiness", as represented in a chequered career. Once the philosopher of the French Communist Party and a member of its Political Bureau, he left the Party after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. He then became a champion of dialogues between civilizations and religions, to begin with between Christians and atheists, then between protagonists of the three monotheistic religions. He converted to Protestantism, then to Islam. The somewhat erratic course of his life has laid him open to accusations of inconsistency, despite the undeniable rigour of his argumentation.

But support for Garaudy came from an unexpected source. The 86-year old Abbé Pierre, a legendary figure of unimpeachable reputation who, during the Nazi Occupa-

tion, risked his life on numerous occasions to help French Jews, and who now defends the Palestinians and the Lebanese, rose to Garaudy's defense. In an open letter to the author of the controversial book, whom he addressed as "my friend", the highly respected priest said that although he had not read the entire book, he had read enough to know that it was, like all Garaudy's books, a meticulously researched work that deserved to be calmly assessed.

This vote of confidence from the Abbé Pierre caused quite a stir in France, where Garaudy is under fire from all quarters. Even the Communist Party, which under the leadership of Robert Hue has tried to woo Garaudy back into its fold and to dissipate the ill-feeling occasioned by his expulsion for stands he took in the past, was severely critical of his book, which it described as lacking objectivity.

If all these incidents prove one thing, it is that the consecration of Israel's legitimacy promises to remain a high-priority issue in the foreseeable future. Israel was created in the context of tense relations between Christian Europe and its Jewish communities. The tensions between the two sides are as yet unresolved. Although the spotlight is now focused on the acute conflict between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East, the conflict is in reality a tripartite game in which the third player is the Christian West.

Of course, the wholesale slaughter of Jews qualifies as genocide whether the number of victims is one million or four million. The real reason behind Israel's refusal to countenance any investigation aimed at determining the exact figure for purposes of historical accuracy is that it feels vulnerable if key elements in Zionist propaganda are desanctified.

The issue is rendered even more sensitive by the fact that today, and from within Israel itself, a new generation of historians are questioning many of the myths and taboos whose perpetuation is perceived by many Jews as a prerequisite for survival. It is time they realised that for a stable peace to take hold in the region, mythology must give way to historical accuracy.

Sounding a new era

By Naguib Mahfouz

President Mubarak's birthday is an appropriate occasion to assess his achievements over the last 15 years. Mubarak inherited an economic crisis in a nation suffering unemployment and corruption, religious strife and terrorism. The country's infrastructure was in shambles. Israel had not yet completed its evacuation of the Sinai Peninsula, and Egypt's relations with most Arab states had been severed. Mubarak, then, began his term of office in a far from promising circumstances.

While President Sadat was responsible for switching the economy from central planning to a free market, it was his successor who implemented the change during a presidency that has been characterised by a clear stance against terrorism.

President Mubarak's period in office will, I think, increasingly come to appear the harbinger of a new era, distinguished by unprecedented levels of freedom. Whatever the scare-mongers say, no opinion has been suppressed during his tenure. Never has the population felt as free to express its opinions as during Mubarak's presidency.

In foreign affairs he has been able to reestablish our links with all the nations of the world, and to restore Egypt to its rightful place at the heart of our region.

This regime, like any other, has some negative aspects, but I cannot think of any that were not inherited and which Mubarak has not attempted to rectify.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salimawy.



Close up
Salama A. Salama
The show
goes on

Leap of faith

Sir I was... shooting at... along with... and declines... have been... drive

During the past... some question... magical country... some of the... time to have... A major portion... a pattern which... always preceded... confidence in... in the tourism... to bring the... return, the industry... curacy.

An excellent example... while I was in Egypt... again when tourists... price increases were... government lifted the... of the Nile.

Why? There are... Egypt in great abundance... back off on security... for trouble? And the... \$1,000 plus increase... And now, as we

سكول من الاطفال

Close up

Salama A. Salama

The show goes on

The peace process is the longest running show in town. The theatre just never closes. No one takes a holiday, the actors never go on strike, never take a break. They do not fall ill or die. What is unique, though, in this ongoing drama is that the script is constantly mutated. They move in different, unexpected directions. Nor is it audience approval that is being sought. At times it seems that it is irrelevant whether those in the auditorium applaud or throw bricks.

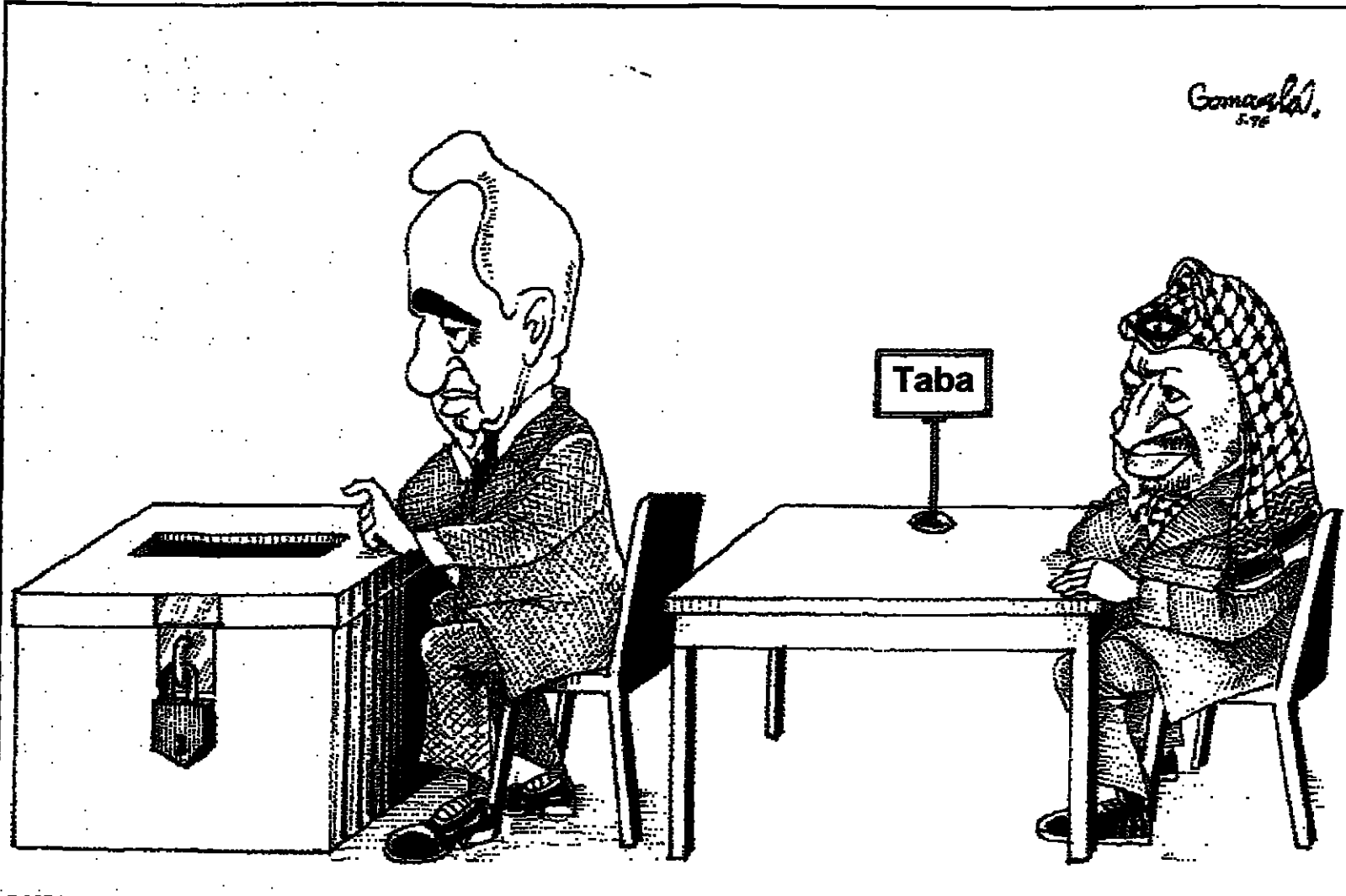
The plot, in its current phase, appears to lack purpose. It has run into trouble, and the head-director appears too much preoccupied with his own electoral problems to impose any vision on the proceedings. Suddenly the people of the Middle East find Washington playing a supporting role to Israel, improvising on the agreed text until it is unrecognisable, and calling for new actors to participate in an increasingly unconvincing peace process.

Frustrations no longer focus on a crippled peace process, on the trail of broken Israeli promises, for now the text has been splattered with blood. The civilian population of Lebanon now vie with the hungry residents of Gaza and the West Bank in the victim stakes. And American bias towards Israel has reached such proportions as to render the US incapable of effecting the peace process in a positive way.

Arabs have known for some time that in a presidential election year US policy is invariably paralysed. But now we witness a new twist to the plot, the novel feature being that for the first time ever an American president is acting as campaign manager of an Israeli prime minister, with the latter returning the favour. Re-inforcing the main plot is a new sub-plot, in which the US administration shows Israel with military aid in complete contradiction to efforts to bring about peace in the region.

The European Union too, has a minor role in the twists and turns of this tortuously unfolding soap opera. Unfortunately this role has been reduced to that of the ingenue. Nor does the false naïveté shown by the European troika during its visits to Egypt and other regional states lead one to believe that it will ever be able to carve out a bigger role. The impotence of Europe in dealing with the Balkan crisis had a very negative effect on its credibility in the region.

But perhaps the most sinister plot line that might unfold in the region is lacking in novelty after all. Certainly nothing would create a heightening of tension more than a good old-fashioned arms race, which is, after all, the most likely result of the American departure from its avowed aims of arms control. The American secretary of state for foreign affairs, Warren Christopher, has cast doubts on Syrian intentions. Israel, it seems, is returning to character, increasingly depending on brute force as the most convincing guarantor of its own security. The Israelis, it seems, are intent on returning to their old script. Should this really happen, then no one can be surprised if the show comes to an end. The audience in the region has seen it all before. And maybe the theatre will, in the end, have to close — be blacked out is the theatrical expression. The show, after all, cannot go on for ever.



A question of time

The Arabs need a new Ibn Khaldun, writes **Hassan Hanafi**. Without a new awareness of history we will continue to float in ahistorical limbo, adrift on the seas of the past

Historical consciousness is the basis of political consciousness. The lack of a historical consciousness renders policies amateur and strains national unity to the point that "hostile brothers" — the fundamentalists and secularists in Algeria are a case in point — slaughter each other. Fundamentalists play the part of past generations in their defence of religion and identity, while secularists seek to represent future generations in defence of modernism. The question we must ask both groups is: which historical stage are we living in now? What is the contribution of the present generations? What is the nature of the present, which can neither be made into the past (as the fundamentalists would have it) nor launched into the future (as the secularists would do)?

Hegemony over the present is not simply a question of obtaining political power, the aspirations of the regimes and the opposition notwithstanding. Rather, it is the ability to grasp the nature of the present historical conjuncture. In the case of Arab society, the present means the shift from one stage to the next, from the old to the new, or from tradition to modernity, without renouncing one or the other, thereby preserving authenticity while entering the modern world, achieving change through continuity with the past and safeguarding the Arab-Islamic identity throughout history.

Arab thinkers began to raise the issue of history during the nineteenth century Arab renaissance. The liberal school undertook the search for history. Al-Tahtawi found it in pre-Islamic Arab history, in the memoirs of the Hijaz dweller, or in Western history, namely the history of Charles X or the history of the French monarchy. But he kept looking for an absolute model of Arab revival, which he finally found in the philosophy of enlightenment: freedom, consultation (*shura*), political pluralism, constitution, parliament, limited monarchy, and education. Khairuddin Al-Toussi reached the same conclusion; but never was the question raised as to why the idea of history as historical consciousness was absent from Arab thought. Liberalism remained a dream, a remote hope aborted soon after the eruption of the modern Arab revolutionary movements. The struggle for the defence of freedom, democracy, pluralism and human rights continues to this day, but without an examination of the root causes within Arab history which prevent Arab society from achieving freedom.

Religious reform movements attempted to create historical consciousness. Al-Afghani's philosophy of history, for instance, is based on moral values such as courtesy, sincerity and honour, as if the historical process consisted of individual and group ethics. In the final section of "The Message of Monotheism", Mohamed Abdou contributed an analysis of historical consciousness to theology: the spread of Islam,

at a pace unprecedented in history, was proof that revelation was possible. Abdou also analysed the emergence of various creeds and explained that their formulation and conflicts were the products of historical events, namely the wars of apostasy, disagreements over the imamate and politics, violent confrontations, disagreements over faith, disbelief, blasphemy, disobedience and hypocrisy. Adib Ishaq, on the other hand, formulated a philosophy of history along the lines of the principles of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment. Then Abdallah El-Nadim attempted to return to the Egyptian and Arab-Islamic context in the creation of history and participation in the course of events, resistance to occupation, the unification of the nation and solidarity. According to Nadim, history moves according to a dynamic law of individual energies and collective popular action.

The reform movement, however, with the rise of the modern Islamist movement, has led to ahistorical absolutist thought and a restrictive view of Islam, divorced from time and space and based on such notions as "Islam is the Solution", "Islam is the Alternative", "God is the Sole Arbitrator", "Application of the Shari'a".

Secularist thought, on the other hand, attempted to elaborate a historical consciousness based on an impossible correlation between Arab and Western consciousness. Since the modern Western experience rested on discontinuity and rupture with the past (Aristotle and the Church) in favour of rationality, science and civil society, the Arab modern experience should follow suit. Shibli Shumayyil, Farah Antoun, Yasaqub Sarouf, Salama Moussa and Zaki Naguib Mahmoud have advocated this concept, hence overlooking the specificity of every historical consciousness in favour of a unique model, namely that based on the Western experience.

Despite attempts by these currents of contemporary Arab thought to thoroughly examine history, they were unable to crystallise a sense of historical consciousness. On the contrary, local, national and Islamic movements in the Arab world have failed to develop accurate tools for historical analysis. States are the outcome of the division of the Ottoman Empire after the first world war and the distribution of the legacy of the "sick man of Europe", European colonialism and the national liberation movements which fought for independence. The state is the heir of this history and has no source of legitimacy outside this historical context.

The nation-state is also the offspring of

history, a reaction to the caliphate's failure to unify the nation within a pluralist context and its persecution of nationalist movements — Arab, Armenian, etc. — which it viewed as a threat to the unity of the state. This was the starting point for Sati' Al-Husari: pan-Arabism evolved with the eruption of the anti-colonialist movement. This concept of pan-Arabism was most clearly represented by the Arab Socialist Baath Party. It reached its climax with Nasserism, and so became "Arab nationalism", advocating liberty, socialism and unity. These values were the backbone of Arab revolutions and modern unification projects, especially the merger between Syria and Egypt.

The Islamic nation (*umma*), as interpreted by Al-Afghani and Islamist movements at present, holds fast to history and the political heritage until the Ottoman era. It stresses legitimacy and the unity of the *umma* which transcends national geography and ethnicity, and is based on the unity of faith and vision. Within this perspective, the *umma* has become an ahistorical absolute, which pits the Islamist movement against the concept of the nation and Arab nationalism.

Faced with these options, which are very real dimensions of historical consciousness, vision has been blinded, goals have clashed, and political forces have struggled to defeat each other. All this occurred in the absence of thorough analysis of historical consciousness or its overlapping conceptual "circles". (The Nasserist-Islamic discourse which encompassed the three circles of identity — Egyptian, Arab and Islamic — is an exception to this rule.)

Despite these contemporary attempts to formulate a sense of historical consciousness, this consciousness has not been realised in time and space — as conjuncture. At present it groans under "absolutes" and is shattered by political ideologies. The theoretical consciousness of history, i.e. the contemplation of history, is totally absent. Mohamed Ali refused to read a history book offered to him by his son Ibrahim after he had conquered the Levant, because he was the maker of history. This might be the reason for the absence of historical research during ancient times: our ancestors shaped history from the early conquests until the fall of Spain. Ibn Khaldun wrote the history of this period prior to the second wave of conquests of the East starting with Mohamed Al-Fateh (the Conqueror) and the Ottoman state. Al-Sakhawi also discussed this era in *Al-I'lan Bi'l-Tawbith Liman Dhamma Al-Tarikh* ("Reprehension to

Those Who Dispraise History"), in defence of history and historians. He relied on personal accounts, however, without focusing on the progress of history as historical consciousness.

The major reason for the absence of historical consciousness can be attributed to a lack of "roots" — the perception of history as the evolution of the cultural legacy. For Arab historians, history was confined merely to a description of events without reference to the progression of historical consciousness. They told the story of generations over time and did not focus on historical accumulation across generations, which might have led to the development of historical consciousness.

One can glimpse traces of a theory of historical evolution in early Islamic studies, but these failed to contribute to any awareness of historical evolution. For instance, in theology, history represented a decline from the time of the Prophet to the caliphate to the tyrant king, from the ideal to the best of the worst, from the redeemed group to the splinter, from unity to fragmentation and disbandment and from absolute justice to the whim of the ruler. Hence the best epoch is that of the prophet and the four rightly guided caliphs. In contrast to this view of history as a process of decline, we find the concept of the mahdi (the guided one) or the renovator, who was awaited at the beginning of each century. The concept of the mahdi who would fill the earth with justice and eliminate the reigning oppression explains the potent role played by heroism and leadership in our modern political history.

In Sufism, the perception of history as an ascent emerged in the symbol of the Prophet's miraculous night journey to Paradise. Sufi transcendentalism begins with repentance and progresses to *fana*, the merging of the individual soul with the absolute. Since it is impossible to save the world or to analyse concrete facts, one should rely on imagination; it is always possible to resort to inner contemplation when it is difficult to grasp things through reason.

In philosophy, history was portrayed as the history of peoples, civilisations, the great deeds of the Arabs, the Turks, the Persians and the Indians, and comparisons between the respective accomplishments of these civilisations. Ibn Khaldun undertook a similar project in his theory of the role of Arabs and Berbers in the historical process, which confused history and the theory of civilisational formation. History, nevertheless, is not a major concern of philosophy.

Soapbox

The real test

With the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the socialist bloc and the rise of a new international system in the aftermath of the Gulf War, several states have been paying lip service to democratisation, largely in response to pressure from the IMF, the Paris Club and the American Congress.

Given the sources of these pressures it is unsurprising that in the Arab world democratisation tends to be a synonym for the free market. Liberalism is adopted in its most superficial forms, and then presented as democracy. Multi-party systems are espoused by ruling parties intent on retaining their monopoly on power. Regimes themselves constitute the majority party and not vice versa. Privatisation is pursued with a vengeance while workers are denied the right to strike.

Democracy as a value is confused with democracy as a Western governmental system, allowing many Arab regimes to excuse themselves the duties of true democratisation using cultural specificity as a pretext.

No such confusion, however, surrounds human rights. These have, after all, been formally acknowledged in international conventions, ratified by 13 Arab countries, the latest of which is Kuwait. Human rights encompass the political, civil, economic, social and cultural spheres. They are not implicated in any specific ideologies; they have been formulated by the United Nations, a body representing various cultures, civilisations, and divine principles.

Any society which respects human rights, as they have been spelled out in such documents, deserves to be called a democratic society. In short, the true test of the democratic impulse in any given society can be measured by that society's commitment to upholding human rights.

This week's Soapbox speaker is secretary-general of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights.



Mohamed Fayek

To The Editor

Leap of faith

Sir: I was deeply saddened to hear the news of the shooting at Hotel Europa last month. Since 1986, along with Egyptians, I have experienced the glories and declines of the tourism industry in Egypt and have been severely effected from a business perspective.

During the past 10 years, I have asked myself the same question over and over again: Why does this magical country, filled with kind, gentle people and some of the most magnificent sights in the world, continue to have to suffer like this?

A major portion of the answer comes in the form of a pattern which continues to unfold just as the glories and declines of tourism do; a decline in the industry is always preceded by an event that shakes travelers' confidence in security in Egypt. As a result, everyone in the tourism industry does what is humanly possible to bring the business back. The moment that tourists return, the industry raises prices and backs off of security.

An excellent example of this is what I experienced while I was in Egypt in February and March. Once again when tourists had returned and spirits were again high, heightened security was announced. For example, the price increases were announced. For example, the government lifted the ban on sailing in the upper part of the Nile.

Why? There are outstanding products to sell all over Egypt in great abundance. Why would the industry back off on security in an area where there is potential for a big profit? And the price increase resulted in a 1,000 plus increase to my consumer for future tours. And now, as we are faced with yet another shut-

down of tourism, I would like to pose a few questions to those responsible for tourism in Egypt:

Why is security relaxed the moment tourism returns? Why don't you continue to be committed to a high level of intense security and avoid the continual repetition of the glories and declines of the industry, so that you reach a level of consistency in inbound tourism. And why, in addition, don't you challenge the security issues you face with creative solutions? One example of a creative solution would be to limit traffic in dense tourist areas to registered tourist buses only.

Why do you feel that when tourism returns you can immediately recoup all your financial losses? I can't. Due to the \$1,000 increase mentioned earlier, I was not able to raise my prices one cent. I, too, have an investment in Egypt.

As I write amidst the current climate spearheaded by last month's disaster, I am, once again, faced with losses of significant proportion relating to future tours to Egypt.

As I evaluate the situation, it does not look good. I feel that I must solicit official support and ask what incentives there are for me and my clients to come to Egypt. How can we entice tourists to take the leap of faith when security is shaky?

I would like to know what those in the industry are willing to do in terms of tourists discounts. I would also like to know how they are willing to help me and what specific security policies they are changing to offset last month's tragedy.

Thomas Ecker
president
Journeys of the Mind
Illinois, USA

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah

No more than numbers

Is one supposed to feel any less horrified at the kind of monsters that certain political ideologies make of people when the numbers of their victims are less than presumed or claimed? Would the Israeli massacre of impoverished villagers in the Qana camp have been any less heinous had the numbers of missile-torn women, men and children been closer to 50 than 100?

Perhaps very wealthy people can visualise the concept of "one million". I cannot, except as an abstraction. Human suffering, however, is concrete. When I think of the human cost of the Nazi scourge, I think of individual men, women and children, of the almost inconceivable degradation of being hated and despised by mere virtue of your birth, the mind-boggling pain of being torn away from your loved ones, not knowing of their fate, seeing them suffer.

I think of the humiliation of hunger, the agony of physical pain, the loss of home, friends, family, the unbearable desolation of facing death without hope. I think of what it was like to be Jew in Europe of the '20s, '30s and '40s, and I think of what it is like to be a Palestinian today, and for the past 50 years. A thousand, ten thousand, a million are just more and more and endlessly more of what already is inconceivable pain.

Why then the great hue and cry over Roger Garaudy's latest book, *The Founding*

Myths of Israeli Politics, and in particular over the fact that he questions the accuracy of the claim that six million Jews were killed in the Nazi-perpetrated holocaust?

Is the European sense of guilt over this particular product of Western civilization so fragile as to make the murder of one or two million innocent Jews, men, women and children, any less horrifying than that of six? Does the lesser figure make Nazism any less the monstrous abomination that it was, and remains — even if the neo-Nazi hooligans of today reveal a preference for Turk and Arab-bashing, instead of the commie, gypsy and Jew-bashing of the '30s and '40s.

I have not studied the evidence, nor have I had the chance to read Garaudy's book on the matter, having access only to passages quoted by the press. I am in no position to judge for myself whether he is right or wrong in disputing the sanctified figure for Jewish deaths at Nazi hands. But surely this is a matter that only scientific inquiry could settle.

The whole affair is of course highly reminiscent of the court cases which Egyptian Islamists have been initiating against scholars and artists such as Nassr Hamad Abu Zeid and Youssef Chahine. Allowing for the massive dissimilarity in power and influence between the Zionist movement, on

one hand, and the Islamist movement, on the other, the mechanism is the same — and it is one wherein the symbolic character of the cases in question is of much more significance than the actual issues involved.

For the Zionist movement, what is really at stake is not whether the Nazis murdered one, two or six million Jews, but that it is not permissible for anyone to explore Jewish history outside a Zionist perspective. Zionism sets the law — its official version of the holocaust is no less sanctified than its version of the history of its conquest of Palestine — "the land without a people, for the people without a land".

Abbé Pierre, who has received his fair share of vilification for coming to Garaudy's defence, has been quoted by the French paper *Libération* as pointing out the rather obvious fact that it was the European Catholic Hitler who murdered European Jews. He added, however, that, "When we wanted to clear our consciences of Hitler's crimes, we chose the easiest solution: expelling the Palestinians from their land."

In the post-World War II chapter of Jewish history, as set into sacred law by political Zionism, the massacre of men, women and children is belittled, clouded, denied. Much more significantly, it is made into no more than numbers.

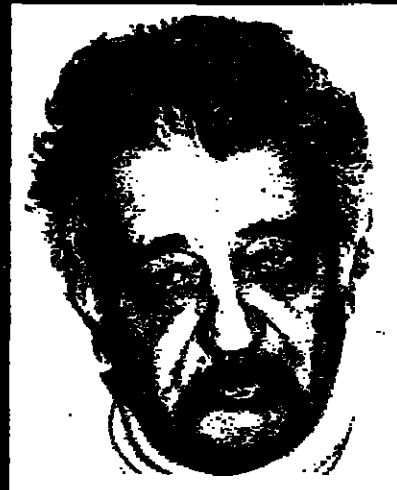
He who remained

Last Thursday Palestinian novelist and political activist Emile Habibi died in Haifa, the town in which he was born. It was his wish to have the poet Mahmoud Darwish, another Palestinian who grew up in Haifa but for a quarter of a century had been prohibited from returning, to lead the funeral orations. Interviewed after the funeral Darwish recalled parading through the streets of the town, on May Day, behind Habibi.

Habibi left instructions that the words "He who remained in Haifa" be inscribed on his tombstone. It is this remaining, as opposed to returning, that is the key to Habibi's literary production and political struggle. A member of the Israeli Knesset for 20 years, Habibi resigned to dedicate himself to writing, producing *Al-Waq'a* (The Strange Events Surrounding the Disappearance of Saeed, the ill-fated pessimist), a novel which brilliantly captures the ambivalence marking the lives of

those Palestinians who became citizens of Israel.

Throughout his political life Habibi remained a controversial figure. His acceptance of the 1947 UN resolution establishing two states on the land of Palestine and, from the early 1950s, his membership of the Israeli parliament, tended to be viewed by Arab nationalists as an acceptance of the right of the aggressors to remain where they had no right to be. Habibi, though, always argued that acceptance was the best that could be hoped for from a bad lot. In 1992, when Habibi accepted Israel's most prestigious literary prize, the controversy reached its height. Many leading Arab intellectuals, including Darwish, urged Habibi to refuse the



award, bestowed by Shamir. Whatever reservations were felt about Ha-

bibi's political stance there is no doubt that "pessimism", a portmanteau word combining pessimism and optimism which Habibi introduced into the Arabic language, has become a catchword among Arab intellectuals over the last two decades. Taking *Candide* as a point of departure, Habibi introduces Swiftian shadows into Voltaire's irony, producing a world of black comedy that confronts his readers with painful, unresolved questions.

"It could have been worse." So intones Saeed the Pessimist, representative not only of alienated and oppressed Palestinians, but an archetypal, universal anti-hero who teeters forever on the brink of the abyss yet contrives never to fall. "It could have been worse." Taking Pangloss's best of all possible worlds a step further, Habibi constructed his own strategy to confront the desperate daily reality of his nation.

The place of the question mark

Arab culture in Israel is the result of the successful struggle of the few Palestinian Arabs who managed to stay in their homeland, in the area of Palestine where the state of Israel was established, in 1948. They numbered no more than 140-150,000, out of more than 800,000 Palestinian Arabs who were living in this area before the establishment of Israel. Arab culture was thus moulded in the fire of this struggle (constituting) one of its main weapons against Zionist policies and the practice of uprooting Palestinian Arabs from their towns and villages, their agricultural land and from their homeland. It could not persist and flourish where Zionist ideology ruled supreme without being the direct antithesis of that ideology.

Arab culture had to confront — directly, courageously and without any hesitation — the retarded culture of racism with the noble human culture of equality and the brotherhood of people and nations. The culture of racism is retarded, if not worse; vandalism breeds invalids even if they are able to calculate their accounts with computers and use sophisticated weaponry. The stone age savagery of the anti-Arab racists has aroused against them, against the mark of Cain, hundreds and thousands of our Jewish brothers and sisters in Israel.

Israel's former army chief of staff, Raphael Eitan, compared our brothers and sisters in the Occupied Territories to "cockroaches in a bottle". Ex-prime minister Begin, who said that he saw around him everywhere the ghosts of his dead soldiers, has called the Palestinians "animals walking on two legs". The 400,000 Jewish brothers and sisters who demonstrated against the crimes of Sabra and Shatila are not invalids, but the standard bearers of the validity of our cultural principles — the principle of the brotherhood of nations.

It is the racism who are invalids. Let me give you a recent example concerning a senior official in the Israeli Censorship Department. He is no doubt a university man. We had arranged a national festival of Arab theatrical groups. We gave the festival a traditional name, the Day of the Mill: *Yom El-Tahooni Yom*. In the old days the villagers considered the day when they ground their corn and wheat as a day of popular gatherings and festivity. The professor-censor, who is supposed to know Arabic better than the Arabs, misinterpreted this slogan. In Arabic, it is as I have said *Yom El-Tahooni Yom*. But he read it as *Yom Elli Tahooni Yom* which means "the day when they expelled us". And he ordered the police to forbid the festival. We tried to explain his mistake to him, but he insisted that he knew better.

Such are in general the people who rule over our country and who think they can decide the fate of our people... both inside and outside the green line. This may explain the fact that only progressive Arab culture, particularly literature, could persist and develop in Israel.

Arab culture in Israel... (is) the continuation of Arab culture and heritage in general... The universalist features of Arab literature in Israel today are a continuation of this heritage, made preeminent by the internationalist education of those who continued to live in Palestine, those whom the disaster of 1948 spared in order to fulfil the duty of continuing Arab culture in Israel and by the objective necessity of challenging the racism and mystification of Zionist ideology.

It should be emphasised here that the preeminence in Arab literature produced in Israel of... universalist features is a continuation of a feature of Palestinian Arab literature produced before the creation of Israel. We consider ourselves... pupils of the distinguished progressive Arab writers of Palestine: Abu Salma, Ibrahim Tugan, Abdel-Rahim Mahmoud, Mukhlis Amr and others who were either put to the sword or buried in the ruins of their own towns and villages or in the quicksands of destitution...

Direct and daily confrontation with Zionist policies and the practice of expelling the Arab people from their homeland, the direct and daily confrontation with racist Zionist ideology, contributed specific new features to Arab culture in Israel. We have all the facts in the sphere of policy and practice which prove that the Zionist leadership before and after the establishment of Israel understood the Jewish state in Palestine as being purely Jewish, cleansed of the country's Arabs.

In March 1955 the head of the political department of the Histadrot (Israeli Trade Union Federation), the late Ruben Bankat, expressed this astonishment in the following words: "We have not gained practice yet," he said, "in our behaviour towards minorities. We expected the State of Israel to be a pure Jewish State without minorities." By "minorities" is meant... the Palestinian Arab minority in Israel. Until today the existence of another people in Israel — the Palestinian Arab people — is refused. They refuse to recognise this people even in the Occupied Territories. We are, in the eyes of Zionist ideology, either non-existent, infiltrators or terrorists.

The late Golda Meir went to her grave declaring "There is this so-called Palestinian Arab people?" Yet this same lady confessed openly — without seeing the fateful contradiction — that she was kept awake at night whenever she remembered that every minute an Arab child was born in Israel. An ex-member of the Likud ruling faction, Amnon Len, expressed astonishment at the fact that even the cold blooded massacre of 49 peaceful Arab villagers while returning to their village of Kufur Qasem at the end of a day of back-breaking toil in their fields did not force the Arabs of the neighbouring villages... to flee Israel.

This unprovoked massacre, committed by a contingent of the Israeli army on the orders of their superiors, took place on 29 October, 1956... the very day on which the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration was celebrated. Amnon Len published an article in the evening newspaper *Yediot Aharonot* on 19 December, 1975, which concluded as follows: "We lived in the country until 1956 in an atmosphere of anticipation. The Jews anticipated that the Arabs would leave the country, but at this stage [1956] it became clear to the Jews that the Arabs who had stayed in Israel did not intend to leave the state." Even the repulsive incident of Kufur Qasem, he said, "did not bring the Arabs of the neighbouring villages to the conclusion that they should run away across the border."

I do not intend in the scope of this paper to relate the history of our popular struggle in Israel. I only wish to stress that our struggle, helped and supported by our Jewish democratic brothers, was not an easy one. Our people had from the very beginning to fight to secure the elementary rights of a citizen in his own country. Our women and children had many times to throw their bodies before the wheels of army trucks in order to stop those trucks from carrying their fathers and husbands and brothers across the borders after they were declared to be infiltrators. A knock at your door one night during those dark days was not a knock of a visiting neighbour, it was either a sign that they were coming for you to throw you out of your



Mahmoud Darwish returns to where Emile Habibi rests (photo: AFP)

home and away from your family or a sign that your friend and comrades had been taken away.

To be or not to be: that was, and... is, the challenge with which we and our culture were confronted by Israel from the beginning. Yet we were able not only to frustrate the Zionist policy and practice of expelling our people from their homeland, we were able to instill pride in new generations of our people. Always we remind our proud new generations of comments made by Yuri Lurani, one-time advisor to the Israeli prime minister on minority problems, the present advisor on the Lebanese problem, who in 1961, while defending the military rule imposed on the Arabs until 1966, expressed his disappointment that there were many Arab students in the universities...

I am not indulging in self-praise; I am speaking of a people and their culture. I wish to give an example from Ghassan Kanafani's well-known novel *Men in the Sun*. It took Kanafani more than 10 years from the tragedy of the Arab people of Palestine in 1948 to reach the conclusion that if you do not knock with both hands on the walls of the tank in which you are imprisoned, and unless you shout, you will die... without anyone taking any notice. We in Israel have not been given the leisure to wait... Either we knock and shout every minute of every day or we will be knocked out and find ourselves behind iron bars or worse.

It is for this reason that we cherish the limited — and in a sense wide — democracy which exists in Israel, whose value is curtailed by pro-fascist ruling circles. But if we were and are able to knock and shout, the credit is due to the just... policy we pursue, a policy made possible by the common democratic struggle of Jews and Arabs against aggression, national oppression and racial discrimination, for de-

mocracy, equality and a just, lasting peace...

We, in our country, were not given the privilege of waiting... We could not, even if we wished, wait for the handsome Arab knight to come across the borders on his white steed to liberate us. Those among us who had such illusions were brought to their senses by the electric shock of June 1967.

The recent plight of the PLO and of all our people as a result of what is happening in the north of Lebanon now has grieved us in the utmost. We condemn all those responsible for this latest blood bath inflicted on our people...

Yet, we must not despair. The Zionist rulers of Israel tried to use this new tragedy for the benefit of their aggressive, pro-imperialist policies, for the benefit of their racist ideology. "The Palestinians are killing each other," they cried from the rooftops. "What else can we expect from them?" they asked. Such arguments and their like we have to answer as a people and as a culture.

From the very beginning this duty, among others, has characterised our literature. We have paid and continue to pay the price of reactionary Arab connivance with imperialism and Zionism. We continue to pay the price for the nationalistic slogans and policies of irresponsible bourgeois national leaders in different Arab countries.

Nevertheless, we do not think it is now as easy for the Zionist propagandists to mislead Israeli or international public opinion as it was in the past. The barbaric atrocities committed or instigated by Israeli ruling circles during the recent aggression in Lebanon, culminating at Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, cannot be washed away either by time or by any other crime committed by the order of this or that Arab government.

The victims are the same — the Palestinians. Whatever the nationality of the hand committing the crime, the original sins are one and the same. Why from the very start did Palestinians in their wandering reach Tripoli and Lebanon? How dare any human being, any civilised person, allow himself to forget the fact that the Palestinian refugees have a homeland from which they were driven by force by the Zionist and pro-imperialist rulers of Israel? Why are the refugees in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip... not allowed to return to their towns and villages inside the State of Israel? Those who deny the elementary right of people to live in their homeland, who insist in pursuing the refugees wherever they find shelter, are simply — and I say it without apology — criminals.

(The)... Zionist ideologues... have continued to confiscate Arab land, raze Arab villages and throw ever more Palestinian Arabs into the seas of destitution while certain Arab forces furnished them with pronouncements allowing them to proclaim that the Arabs want to throw Israel into the sea.

The rulers of Israel continue to do everything in their power to crush any possibility of establishing a state for the Palestinians. They exert all their energy to crush the very existence of the Palestinians as a nation, and they find, always, that certain Arabs are willing to help them in their falsification of history, willing to help them change the place of the question mark. Whose existence is in fact threatened in the area of Palestine? That of Israel, or that of the Arab people of Palestine?

Text of an unpublished talk, the original title of which is *The Continuation of Arab Culture in Israel*, given by Emile Habibi at The Society of Friends' House, Euston Road, London: 1984

Plain Talk

That European unity has now gone beyond politics and economics to embrace culture is evidenced in a file sent me by the Austrian ambassador about the "European Art Forum". An international cultural symposium, the forum will take place in Salzburg from 23 to 25 May.

The European Art Forum was founded by the State of Salzburg, renowned by such annual cultural landmarks as the Mozart Festival. The aim of the forum, as stated in the file, "is organising annual international meetings on topics of artistic, cultural and political significance." The file highlights the growing understanding that "the future of Europe is dependent not only on economic factors, but to a great extent on cultural development."

Going through the programme one is greatly impressed by both the presence of such distinguished speakers as the president of the Republic of Austria, the governor of Salzburg and Edward Said and by the diversity of the topics. Different working groups will deal with such subjects as "The European Identity from Cultural, Economic and Political Viewpoints", "Arts and Communication of the Future Europe" and "Festivals: Custodians of Tradition or Trend-setters?"

While all the topics are of equal significance, it was natural that the question of cultural identity should interest me. While the cultural identity of Europe will be an important factor in the process of European integration, it is clear that in spite of the dynamism of the unification process, there are some inherent dangers. There are undeniable signs that the citizens of the member states fear losing their culturally-defined identities. France, in spite of its deeply rooted and ancient culture, is one of the countries which has expressed some reservations about the issue. This became quite clear, not only in its interaction within the European union, but vis-à-vis GATT negotiations.

The issue is to what extent culture should have a differentiating or integrating effect. Would that old adage, "unity in diversity", be valid here? And for a country like ours, what is meant by European culture? Or to put it differently, is there a common culture for Europe?

The cultural foundations of most European countries are their Graeco-Roman heritage, with a Christian addendum. This is, no doubt, a unifying element as far as classical culture is concerned. Shakespeare went back to Plutarch for his plots and many European writers were inspired by Dante. But then, I suppose, modern European culture is different. What we read or see in the cultural output of European countries is as different as the difference between Eastern and Western culture.

Another issue which will be raised in the Forum is "Cultural Policy on a European Level". What are the characteristics of such a policy and what are, if any, the common values? One thing worth adding in light of the newly emerging racial prejudices concerns the kind of culture to be taught to the young. At a time when UNESCO is initiating "culture for peace", we find that Europe is far removed from such a policy.

There is no doubt that the forum will be a useful meeting place for the airing of controversial issues. True, the event is a European forum, but I am sure, it would be more effective if non-European participants. Surely, they can contribute usefully to the discussions.

Mursi Saad El-Din

A magician of paradoxes

By Mourid Barghouti

With the cunning of someone looking for the exit to a building that has collapsed Emile Habibi discovered that only irony was capable of telling the sad story of our Arab reality. The collapse of the Arab world, a vast world, rich in human, natural and cultural resources, is a collapse lacking grandeur. Our fall happens without even a sound, without a befitting elegy, as if it is a tragedy that is not tragic, a comedy that is not comic.

This is the duality which Emile adopted as a creative tool for his writing: certainty and doubt, laughter and tears, heroism and treachery, optimism and pessimism. Almost all of the literary works of this renowned Palestinian writer appear to tell his story, the story of a very humorous person living in a very dismal reality. The foreign occupation destroys, among other things, a mirth. In such a situation does irony then become a type of resistance? Broken but full of mirth, defeated but strong, a coward but a hero — this is the character which Emile, in *Al-Waq'a* (The Strange Events Surrounding the Disappearance of Saeed, the ill-fated Pessimist) manoeuvred to cope with the time and place in which he lived. He presented us with a model of a human being living on the edge, searching, laughing, weeping and always trying to make ends meet on that edge. At times broken and fragile, at others, brave and self-possessed, it was as though Habibi, in this character, provided a figure embodying contemporary Arab reality in its entirety.

Because he was a conjurer of paradoxes he was bound to become himself the victim of a paradox, the consequences of which stunned him more than they

stunned both his friends and his foes. Having built his glorious literature upon the optimism-pessimism dialectic, Emile became enmeshed solely in optimism regarding the recent history of the Palestinian cause, launching an attack against the "pessimists" and those in the opposition. This brought upon him many criticisms and enemies which, in turn, made him more stubborn. He did not hesitate to accept a prize from the Israeli state, thus dropping doubt from certainty and pessimism from optimism. The pomegranate of dialectics slipped through the hands of the magician of dialectics, its seeds scattering around him. It was as if he could not gather them again, except in the final paradox which is his death.

I met him for the first time in Prague in 1979, after which we continued to meet in the many capitals of our diaspora, especially in Cairo. At the last dinner bringing us together over two years ago he said to me in passing, while reminiscing about his career: "Our life has not been in vain." He then paused, that ceasing sly, devil's advocate smile lighting up in his eyes, and, as if he could not bear to let the chance of making a humorous remark slip by, added: "But it has been in vain."

Israel is trying to claim Emile Habibi for itself. But it should know that his literary works were nothing other than his means of resisting it and of asserting his identity and the identity, threatened by the occupation, of his Palestinian people. In this sense, and in many other senses, "it" has not been in vain.

Mourid Barghouti is a Palestinian poet living in Cairo.

In praise of the two tall shadows

By Mona Anis

Anyone familiar with the work and life of Emile Habibi will immediately appreciate the central role the two categories, "those who remained" and "those who are to return", played in both his writings and his life. His entire literary output is stamped by this division, and it is no accident that two of the four parts of his most celebrated novel, *Saeed the Pessimist*, are titled *Baqiya* (who remained) and *Yu'ad* (who is to be returned). And between those who remained and those who are to be returned lies the mediating concept of *Jama' al-sham* (reuniting the two categories).

In *Saeed the Pessimist* Saeed's one-time headmaster is found, at the beginning of the novel, in the Jazzer Mosque in Acre, surrounded by ghostlike figures. When Saeed asks the teacher what he is doing he replies "Ajma' al-sham" (I reunite families). The date is 1948, when reuniting families meant searching desperately for loved ones lost in the chaos of the exodus, or insisting on burying the dead in a native town before embarking on a journey of exile.

When, in the middle of the night, the Israeli soldiers knock at the door

of the mosque to announce that the army has decided to return those refugees who had sought sanctuary in the mosque to their villages of origin, some slip out of the side gates saying: "Those who razed our villages are not going to take us back there."

There is a hunger for knowledge and for reunion.

"We are from Kwaykaat. They demolished it and evicted everyone. Did you meet anyone from Kwaykaat?"

"I am from Al-Manshiyya. There is not a stone left standing there except the tombs. Did you meet anyone from Al-Manshiyya?"

"We over here are from Berwah. They forced us out and obliterated it. Did you meet anyone from there?"

Berwah is the native village of the poet Mahmoud Darwish, who was six years old in 1948. When Saeed tells those questioning him at the mosque that he had seen one Berwa woman hiding with her child among the sesame stalks there is no doubt in the reader's mind that the child in question is Darwish, to whom Habibi referred earlier in the novel in the first amazing incident witnessed by Saeed the Pessimist.

Saeed had seen a mother, insisting that she return to Berwah, driven

away by a gun aimed at her child's head. When the woman finally yielded to the threats and began, as ordered, to move eastward, Saeed noticed that "the further the woman and the child went from where we were, the governor and I, the taller they grew. By the time they merged with their own shadows in the sinking sun they had become bigger than the plain of Acre itself. The governor still stood there awaiting their final disappearance... Finally he asked in amazement: 'Will they never disappear?'"

But tall shadows do not simply disappear on request. And what Habibi once said about Darwish applies equally to him. His last gesture before dying was an act of *jama' al-sham*, of reuniting the exiled poet with his people. It is a gesture that will have raised a great many eyebrows. But along with the epitaph on his grave-stone, simply marking the final resting place of one "who remained in Haifa", it was a perfectly choreographed act, worthy of that great master, Habibi the Pessimist.

Emile Habibi, born Haifa 1922, died Haifa, 2 May 1996. Writer, journalist, political activist and former

member of the Israeli Knesset, Habibi received his Baccalaureate in Acre. He worked as a clerk in an oil company before joining the Palestinian Broadcasting Station's cultural section. He resigned his radio post in 1945, joining the Palestinian Communist Party as a full-time political activist. Founding member of the Palestinian League for National Liberation, a signatory to the Beirut Four-Party Manifesto which called for the acceptance of the 1947 UN resolution establishing Jewish and Palestinian states on the land of Palestine. From 1952 until 1972 he represented the Communist Party of Israel (RAKAI) in the Israeli Knesset. Editor of the party's Arabic newspaper, *Al-Tithad*, until his resignation from the party in 1980, following increasingly bitter disputes with the party leadership. Author of *The Sextet of the Six Days* (1968), *The Strange Events Surrounding the Disappearance of Saeed, the Ill-Fated Pessimist* (1974), *Lukaa' Son of Lukaa' (1980)*, *Akhthiya (1985)*, *The Fanciful Tale of Saraya, the Ghoul's Daughter (1991)*, *Um Al-Rubabika (1992)* and *A Word Without Cages: Letters and Literary Articles (1993)*.

Fruit cocktail

WHEREVER we look these days there are fruit galore. Time to really go crazy, start a fruit diet, present your guests with fruit salads.

Buying however is more complicated: prices and quality vary widely. You have seen peaches prettily piled up on a cart, at half the price you have just paid. Where is the catch, you wonder.

Your favourite green grocer has all these exotic newcomers on the Egyptian market. Should you go for something new? At this point it is all a matter of luck.

If you are adventurous any display is worth a try especially out in the country where you find fresher products at lower prices. Keep this in mind when buying fruit grown in Egypt like our delicious wild bananas, oranges, watermelons, large melons and gwavas.

If your taste is inclined towards something more sophisticated, buy your pineapples, kiwis, and cantaloupes from your usual green grocer. There you have the added advantage of telling him how mushy the golden apples you bought yesterday were. He won't do anything about it but it feels so much better when you can complain...and maybe next time he will not unload his second choice on you.

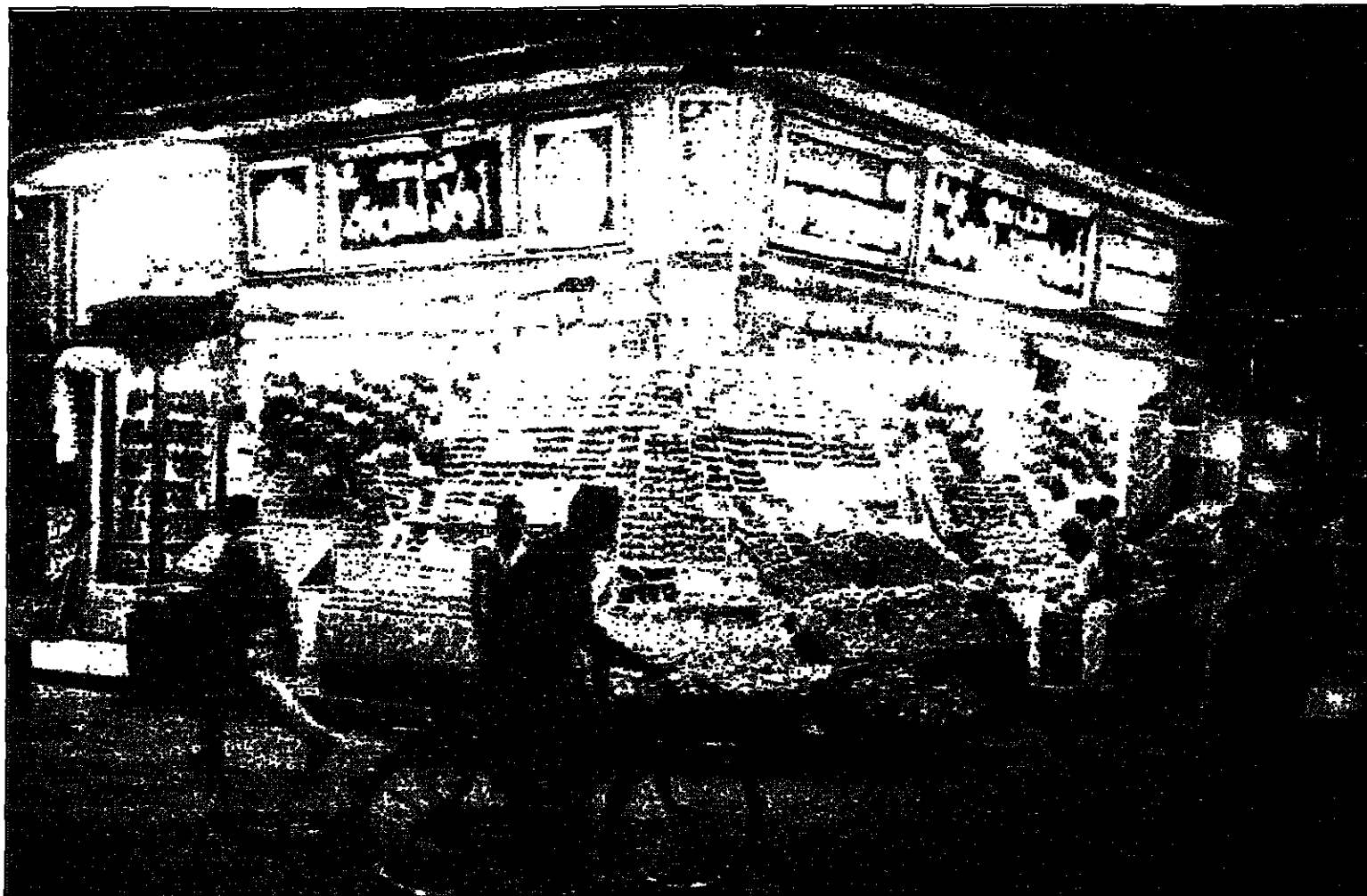


photo: Sherif Samir



Baby, you can drive my car

Driving around Cairo is what it is. There is no denying that making it from here to there every day, having caused a minimum of scratches and dents all around, is something to be proud of. Well, it makes me proud, anyway, although sometimes I get hints that my fortunate arrival at destination is due less to my expertise than to blind chance, at least according to my daughter, who feels less than comfortable when I am behind the wheel.

I think she has an attitude problem, wanting to make me aware of the generation gap and all. "Don't you believe in changing gears once in a while?" she often mutters, or, when in a particularly cheery mood: "When I'm rich, wouldn't you love me to buy you an automatic?" She should be more supportive, though. As I recall it, I was never described as a born driver by any of my many teachers.

My parents vetoed the idea of driving lessons, on principle. They had no intention of buying me a car anyway, ever, as they often told me, and as for the family vehicle, it came complete with a surly driver, so what more could I ask for? Besides, what was wrong with a brisk walk?

I talked a friend into teaching me on his almost brand-new 1960-something Ford, the apple of his eye. He soon developed nervous tics and recurring nightmares. I thought he was overreacting; after all, we had only climbed a footpath once, and that against my will — and his. "Be thankful I haven't killed anyone yet," I advised him as he was inspecting the damage — negligible — to his front fender.

This must have set him thinking about long prison terms, for he decided I needed a licence in case we should be required to have dealings with the police. The way he said it led me to believe that he expected such an eventuality to take place sooner rather than later. "Well, buy me a licence for my birthday," I said airily (I was practicing being a dizzy blonde in those days). He was shocked. I would have to go through the test just like everyone else, he informed me self-righteously (I dumped him soon after).

I had no one else to turn to, so I reluctantly agreed. We set forth one morning, he sick with nerves, I dressed to kill (my spirits are always uplifted when I can slip into unusual little numbers). "Where do you think you're going?" he growled when he saw me. "This is a driving test, not a beach party."

We were off to a bad start, I thought; nevertheless, I hated my lashed-dizzy blonde style and let it pass. I had butterflies in my stomach too. We drove through narrow streets and finally arrived in a small, crowded square. There were rows of cars facing a low, makeshift sort of building. My friend smoothly inserted the car into a vacant space and we changed places. I was now behind the wheel. I could see a bespectacled little officer filling out forms at his desk in the little cabin. Cars were moving in and out of the rows, but I paid them no attention.

Suddenly hit by the solemnity of the occasion, my knees had begun to shake uncontrollably. "Do as I tell you," my friend hissed. He looked sick. "Go," he shouted suddenly, but my ears were buzzing and I could hardly hear him. I made a couple of false starts. I was ready to cry. Finally I managed to get the engine running, with only a few hiccups. "Go, go," urged my friend, furiously. The gears screamed. I pumped the gas. A formidable jerk later, we came to a halt, car at just ten centimetres away from the bespectacled officer's desk.

I was not really clear as to what had happened. My friend's hand was still clenched in a death grip on the hand brake. The officer, surprised at first, rose to the occasion as soon as he realised there was a lady behind the wheel. He brushed aside the door frame, now poised astride the hood, and helped me out, assuring me all the while that everything was all right. I shouldn't worry, and how did I like my coffee? He summoned a subaltern to extract the car from the debris. It had just a few scratches and hardly any dents — not enough, I thought, to warrant my friend's scowl.

"We are honoured by your visit," the officer was saying, "and what can I do for you?" Before my friend could tell him that we would surrender peacefully (the unfortunate kind of thing he would say, I was sure), I regained my composure and pulled the dizzy blonde act. "A driving licence, if you please," I said with a smile, essaying a childish lip. "Of course," said the officer, dusting plaster off his desk. He ordered our coffee, then pulled some forms out of his drawer. Half an hour later, I had an officially issued, duly stamped driving licence (I never forget to renew it).

The officer accompanied us to the car and gallantly opened the passenger's door. "Let him drive — always," he whispered gently. "It may be safer."

Fayza Hassan

Sensitive spots

As part of the Ministry of Health's seven-year-old endeavour to spread awareness about AIDS and the virus that causes it, HIV, two new public service announcements will soon be broadcast on the main two channels of Egyptian television. Concerned women's rights activists are hoping that the new spots will avoid the mistake of previous productions that tended to project women as the party responsible for the spread of the epidemic.

Scheduled for screening during the coming few weeks, the new public service announcements will focus on the life of an HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) carrier and a person living with AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). One spot addresses the negative impact of the epidemic on the individual's productivity at work and on the future of younger generations. The second spot illustrates how infected individuals can lead a relatively normal life without being a threat to other people's health. Each is about three minutes long and will be shown during prime time to guarantee a large audience.

Since 1989, the Ministry of Health, in cooperation with other concerned bodies like the Red Crescent Society, have produced 10 television spots about HIV and AIDS. "The spots focused on informing people about AIDS and specifying means of infection. The objective was to alert people to the threat and at the same time limit the scope of concern because people were getting seriously paranoid," explained Dr Nasr El-Sayed, director of the National Programme for the Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS.

But some women's rights activists argue that in the course of getting this message across, the spots seem to have committed the terrible mistake of projecting

women as the source of infection. "On the whole these spots were very useful in making people learn a lot about HIV and AIDS, but more attention should be paid to the image of women," said Sawan El-Sheikh, director of the Egyptian Association for the Control of AIDS.

The overwhelming tone in the spots is that prostitutes are the main source of infection. The most flagrant case is the spot with the theme "Dangerous: Stay away" where the camera zooms in on the legs of a woman wearing lace nylons — suggesting she is a call girl. The legs stop walking before a man who then follows in their footsteps. Meanwhile, a man with a husky voice warns, "Avoid the danger."

The message some of these spots send to the public underlines the need to reconsider the concept of the awareness campaign. Asked about his reaction to the "Dangerous: Stay Away" spot, a semi-literate police drafter told Ministry of Health researchers, "It suggests that no honourable man should follow a woman, because if he so much as steps on her footsteps he will catch AIDS."

In another response that demonstrated the degradation of women's status in these spots, a 45-year-old mechanic who is married to three women, said, "This is why men are entitled to be polygamous. If a man has four wives, he doesn't need to look elsewhere and risk infection." Some women say they are genuinely annoyed by these spots. "I hate sitting in the living room with my brothers and father when some of these spots are on. I feel so embarrassed," said one woman.

Critics base their reservations about such insinuations on the fact that there is no statistical evidence to prove that having sex with HIV-carrying prostitutes is the main source of infection among

men. According to the latest statistics from the Ministry of Health, 35 living Egyptian women carry HIV or have full-blown AIDS. The number of male HIV carriers and men living with AIDS is significantly higher.

Even though the numbers show that more men are infected than women, women are more vulnerable to infection for a number of reasons. According to a recent UNICEF report, "As the AIDS epidemic grows, it is becoming clear that women are more vulnerable than men." The reasons are both social and biological. Socially, the report notes, women are more vulnerable because they tend to marry or have sex with older men who have had numerous sexual partners. "Often women are not in a position to say no or to influence their partner's sexual behaviour," the report added.

Biologically speaking, noted Dr Helmi Wahdan, director of the Cairo office of the World Health Organisation, "It has been proven that women are more vulnerable to infection from infected male sexual partners than the other way around." On the one hand, women have a larger mucosal surface exposed during sexual intercourse. On the other, semen carries a greater concentration of the virus than vaginal fluid. Also during pregnancy, child birth and lactation, women's immunity drops and thus they become more susceptible to infection.

According to epidemiologists, it could take only one instance of sexual intercourse for a male HIV carrier to infect a perfectly healthy woman, but it would take several times for an infected woman to transmit the HIV virus to a male sex partner.

"It is very sad that these facts are not clear in the spots produced by the Ministry of Health," com-

mented Mu'mina Karim, a virologist and a leading activist in the awareness campaign.

The producer of these spots, Gamal Shanan, rejected charges of accidental or intentional gender bias. "We have a message that we need to get across: AIDS is dangerous and you need to avoid it. We did not only talk [in the spots] about prostitutes. We talked about transfusions of contaminated blood and about addiction to injectable drugs."

The television spots are the outcome of the team work of members of the national Programme for the Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS, doctors and TV script-writers and producers. "Not once did we say that women are the main source of infection," said El-Sayed. And Shanan argued that the cultural mores that are translated into TV censorship standards do not make his job a very easy one.

However, offended women say that although the spots never blatantly made any accusations, there was a great deal of insinuation. According to El-Sheikh, the prostitutes are victims of the social system that defines them as a high risk group and yet denies them the information they need to protect themselves. "It is only when prostitutes are arrested that we can reach out, via the Ministry of Interior, to talk to them about AIDS and how they could spare themselves the infection," said El-Sheikh.

The real threat of the gender insensitivity of these spots is that they influence the ideas of the vast majority of the population who do not have access to more elaborate reading material. Ensuring these spots meet the gender sensitivity standards which Egypt agreed to when it signed several international conventions on human rights, argue concerned activists, requires much training.

counsellors to follow. Their golden rule is to stick to technical terms and avoid talking about personal views on sexual affairs.

In another effort to acquaint the counsellors with what they will be dealing with, the Ministry of Health conducted an analysis of some 320 calls that were received by the initial telephone counselling operation. The results of the analysis suggest that most callers tend to inquire about the symptoms of the disease and anonymous testing. Other questions are related to safer sex methods, homosexual relations and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Callers are mostly single men. "Seventy per cent are single people. Of the 320 calls, men callers constituted 60.7 per cent and women callers 39.3 per cent," El-Sayed said. The age bracket of the largest number of callers is the same as the average age for sexually active people — from 25 to 35. But teenagers also called.

Non-governmental organisations promoting HIV and AIDS awareness and women's reproductive health say that the centre is a good step in the right direction and will encourage people to discuss their problems freely.

Let's talk about AIDS

Once considered a "non-Egyptian" disease, AIDS is now widely regarded as a major health concern. The stigma surrounding the disease and the virus that causes it, HIV, still persists. However, over the past five years public service announcements on television, billboards, posters, stickers and mass media coverage have made talk about the infectious disease matter-of-fact.

The Ministry of Health is furthering its own HIV and AIDS awareness scheme by starting a hot-line and personal counselling service. In a few days, the Minister of Health will inaugurate the "HIV/AIDS Counselling/Hot-Line Centre" — an expansion of a three-year, small-scale experimental telephone counselling service conducted by the National Programme for the Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS. A massive media campaign will precede the centre's opening in order to familiarise the public with its services and contact numbers.

"The main purpose of this centre is to provide more information that is accurate and scientific," explained Dr Nasr El-Sayed, director of the National Programme for the Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS and the new centre's director. Co-

funded by the Ford Foundation in Cairo, the centre will be based in Imbaba. It will have three booths for counsellors to receive calls and answer queries and two rooms for one-to-one counselling.

Testing for the HIV virus will also be available at the new centre.

The staff of the centre will include doctors, psychologists and social workers who will answer telephone calls and meet visitors. Nurses will also be recruited to run the laboratory.

"As a counsellor, you really encourage people to discuss their problems when you keep their identity anonymous by either answering their questions over the telephone or meeting them in a closed room," El-Sayed added. The director hopes that confidentiality will encourage more people to come forward and be tested for the virus.

Based on previous counselling experience, El-Sayed believes discussing sexual matters is still taboo and social barriers prohibit people from seeking information on sex-related problems, particularly HIV and AIDS. The new centre will house a library so that counsellors can provide

the necessary information for concerned citizens.

Also part of the new project is a database analysis function to help staff fully comprehend the dimensions of Egyptians' perceptions of the disease and formulate future awareness campaigns incorporating the public's concerns.

Throughout its initial phase the centre's working hours will be from 9 am to 5 pm. "Then when more and more people know about and have faith in our service, we expect that it will probably be working on a 24-hour basis," said El-Sayed.

The HIV/AIDS Counselling/Hot-Line Centre is fashioned after a similar centre in Florida in the United States. The Ministry of Health sent the centre's staff to Florida for training to ensure they will develop the necessary communication skills to do their job properly. "The counsellors should be patient with the caller and at the same time make sure that the conversation does not deviate too much from the main issue," El-Sayed said.

To make sure that the service will be culturally sensitive, a number of rules were set for the

Sufra Dayma

Makdous fatta

Ingredients:
1 kg. black aubergine fingers
1/4 kg. minced meat
3 tsp. tomato paste
1 onion finely chopped
1 tsp. crushed garlic
4 tsp. fresh lemon juice
4 cartons yoghurt
200 gms. skinned almonds (fried)
3 leaves pita bread (diced and fried in oil)
1 bunch parsley leaves (finely chopped)

1 medium green pepper (finely chopped)
1 bouillon cube
Corn oil
Butter/ghee
Salt + pepper + allspice + cinnamon

Method:
Stir the yoghurt with a pinch of salt, a dash of garlic and 2 tsp. of lemon juice and set aside. Partly peel the aubergines in strips, then remove the inside, rinse them under tap water, then stuff them with the minced meat. Fry them gently in oil and set aside. In a cooking pan, fry the onion in ghee until golden, then add the garlic, the green pepper, the tomato paste, the bouillon cube, half of the lemon juice, the spices and some water. Bring to boil then cover and simmer over low heat until the sauce cooks and slightly thickens. Put in the fried aubergines to cook in the sauce. Remove them when tender onto a serving plate, then put the fried pita bread in the sauce after removing it from heat, just to soak it, then pour them both over the aubergines, then pour the yoghurt, scatter the almonds, then the parsley, and serve immediately.

Moushira Abdel Malek

Restaurant review

When the sun shines

Nigel Ryan on the joys of the unreconstructed

Lunchtime at Estoril, one of Downtown Cairo's institutions. The early afternoon light shines through the yellow glass door and windows, creating a subaqueous glow. You enter the restaurant and know at once that all is well with the world. The two drawings by Hassan Soliman hang in the same place, opposite two David Roberts prints. It is cool, uncrowded and unhurried. The faces seem somehow familiar.

There is no novelty here but that is all to the good. Should the position of the tables change, should the bar suddenly be gilded, the waiters change their uniforms or even the table clothes be replaced by fashionably pastel linen you would know that something was wrong.

Estoril is that kind of place. The staff remain the same. The service is courteous and unobtrusive. The menu purports to change, with the inclusion daily of a printed sheet listing specials, though these tend to be much of a muchness, and appear at regular intervals. It is one of the few restaurants in Cairo that gives its customers, almost as a matter of right, the sense of well-being that comes from knowing exactly where you are.

Estoril is profoundly unfashionable. It withstands the winds of change with aplomb, refusing both fads and the faddish. It has its regulars, but also contrives to welcome newcomers. Its menu could be given pride of place in a museum of restaurant practice. It is positively antediluvian, and makes no concessions to healthy eating or other aspects of a new fangled trendiness. It might not be to every one's taste though, for one, find it reassuring.

The menu in fact is reasonably extensive. At a push you could include a vegetarian in your party, though they would, admittedly, feel marginalised. Having decided to take a moral stand on eating dead animals it must be slightly disheartening to find that the only alternative is *epinard gratinee*. Moral brownie points, though, have never been simple to score.

I ordered *cote de boeuf marchand de vin*. Estoril has the tendency to make its customers a mite reactionary, and I certainly had no intention of giving in to the recent heat wave. Similarly, my lunchtime companion ordered chicken livers in a Madeira sauce, with rice. Typically, both sauces began from the same stock, though the latter was a little stronger, given that it had been used to sauté the livers.

On a good day the food at Estoril is fine. On a bad day it is seldom less than competent. Last week it was neither a good nor bad day and the food, consequently, was perfectly palatable. The knife slid through the chicken livers — supplemented by a heart or two — like butter. The rib of beef was enormous. Earlier *mezze* had arrived, *babaghanoug* and soft white cheese with tomato, served with melba toast. A mixed salad consisted of *gargir*, tomato and cucumber, with a heavily vinegared dressing.

With soft drinks and coffee, the bill came to LE65. And at Estoril there is seldom any excuse not to tip generously. It is a place to linger, especially when you have to face the heat of afternoon.

Estoril, 12, Talaat Harb Street, Downtown. Tel: 574 3102

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

Across

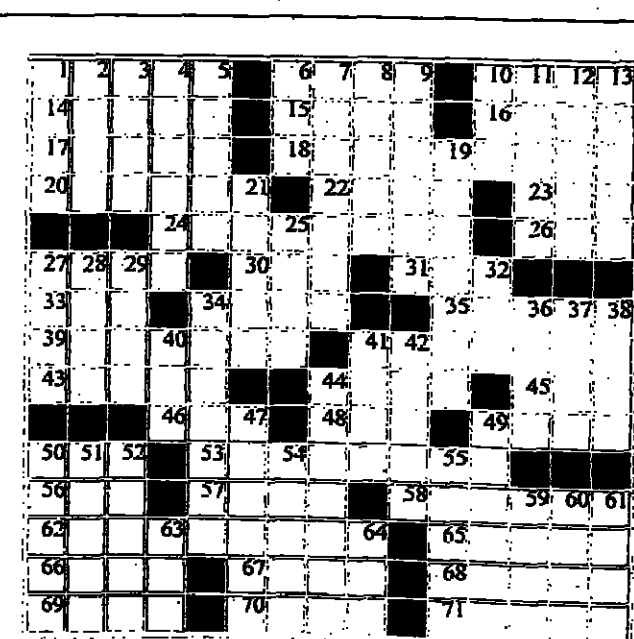
1. Out of order (5)
6. I follows washing, caustic, baking and precedes break and fountain (4)
10. Ruse; pitfall (4)
14. Gold coin in many European countries (5)
15. Mimic (4)
16. Make one's way by force (4)
17. Make amends (5)
18. Women of doubtful reputation, hypn. wds (9)
21. ... France, 60s French president (6)
23. Pry (4)
24. Elongated fish (3)
25. Students of one Semitic language, science and literature (8)
27. Exclamations of hesitation (3)
28. Yew extra-seed covering (4)
31. Isle of... (3)

Apology

Al-Ahram Weekly apologises to its crossword fans for last week's technical error. We are republishing the crossword error-free hopefully this time.

Down

1. Cain's father (4)
2. Silent (4)
3. Sacred image (4)
4. Foot wear (6)
5. navigate: be in the driver's seat (5)
6. Crestfallen (3)
32. Chemical suffix forming names of enzymes (3)
34. Equal-footing (3)
35. Saucer-shaped bell (4)
36. Pertaining to plowed land (5)
40. Drench; plunge (7)
42. Suicases, valises, trunks (7)
44. Poetic form for "spoke" (5)
45. Wan (4)
46. ... Bernardino Pass, Switzerland (3)
47. Auditory apparatus (3)
49. Fuss (3)
50. Flock (4)
51. Cooking recipe abbreviation (3)
54. Condemnation (8)
57. Small deer (3)
58. Arab prince (4)
59. Wiped off (6)
63. Inflammation of joints (9)
66. Justification; defense (5)
67. No better than (4)
68. Too much, Fr. (4)
69. Summer fruit (5)
70. Stiff; formal (4)
71. Stiff hair or bristle (4)
72. Inclined (5)



7. slot (7)
8. The populace (5)
9. Awn (6)
10. Boob (3)
11. Hindu title (5)
12. Common viper (5)
13. Pares (5)
19. Communiqué (7)
22. A Greek island (5)
26. Destruction (4)
28. Sacred bull worshipped by ancient Egyptians (4)
29. Stairs of aircraft (4)
30. ... la Douce (4)
33. Unit of energy (3)
35. Engines on ship (7)
37. Flower holder (4)
38. Culture medium (4)

39. Advance money (4)
42. Supplement (3)
42. Ordered (4)
43. Solo (5)
45. Nationalist (7)
48. Makes payment (6)
50. Curer (6)
51. Vagabond (5)
53. More painful (5)
53. Shallow covered dish for culture of bacteria (5)
55. Crystalline white salt (5)
56. Restrain; spasm (5)
60. Storage place of grain (4)
61. Black (4)
62. Eat (4)
64. Edge (3)
65. Health resort (3)

الأسبوع

Quality: the first impression?



Organisation at the airport



photo: Ashraf Fares

At the granite temple at Giza

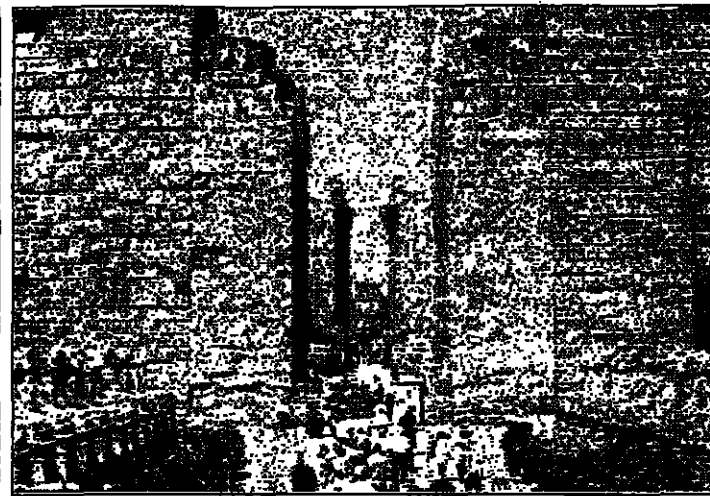


photo: Khaled EL-Fiki

Tourist groups at Karnak

How to get there

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet
Super Jet stations are located in Alexandria (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramses Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurgada and Sinai.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services: Alexandria every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Alexandria and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 5pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE21 until 5pm; LE23 thereafter.

A VIP bus with phone access serves Alexandria. Tickets: from Alexandria LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Port Said
Services: every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 11am, 12pm, 1pm, 2pm, 3pm, 4pm, 5pm, 6pm, 7pm, 8pm, 9pm, 10pm, 11pm. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service: 6.45am, from Ramses Square in Alexandria. Departure Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurgada
Services: 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Hurgada. Departure Hurgada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm; LE45 thereafter.

Alexandria-Hurgada
Service: 8am, from Ramses Square, Alexandria. Departure Hurgada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service: 11pm, from Tahrir, then Alexandria, Departure Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company
Buses travel to north Sinai, south Sinai, Sharm and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qalbi (near Ramses Square), Alexandria and Tahrir Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to north and south Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abnasya Square.

Cairo-Ismailia
Services: every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 4pm, from Qalbi, then Alexandria and Ismailia. Tickets: deluxe bus LE57.50; air-conditioned bus LE52.50, one way.

Cairo-Suez
Services: every half an hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qalbi, then Alexandria and Tahrir Square. Tickets: deluxe bus LE57.50; air-conditioned bus LE52.50, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish
Services: every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qalbi, then Alexandria and Tahrir Square. Tickets: deluxe bus LE57.50; air-conditioned bus LE52.50, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Services: every 45 minutes from 7am to 6.30pm from Abnasya, then Alexandria. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Nuweiba
Service: 8am, from Abnasya, then Alexandria. Tickets deluxe bus LE57.

West Delta Bus
Stations at Tahrir and Abnasya.

Cairo-Hurgada
Services: 8am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE28 one way.

Cairo-Safra
Services: 8am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Ousseir
Service: 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor
Service: 9pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Ain Helwan
Service: 5pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Trains
Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Ain Helwan, from Ramses Station.

Cairo-Luxor-Ain Helwan
French trains
Services: to Luxor and Ain Helwan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40pm and 8pm, Ain Helwan 6.40pm and 8pm). Tickets: first class LE23; second class LE17; third class LE12.

Cairo-Alexandria
Tahiri trains
VIP train: Service: 8am. Tickets: first class LE32 with a meal; LE23 without a meal.

Cairo-Luxor
Services: hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets: first class LE28; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services: 6.30am and 8.45am. Tickets: first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir
Cairo-Ain Helwan
Flights: 6.30am, 10.30am, 11.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 5.30pm, 7.30pm, 9.30pm. Tickets: LE390 for Egyptians, LE591 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Flights: 6.15am, 7.30am, 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 5.30pm, 7.30pm, 9.30pm. Tickets: LE220 for Egyptians, LE370 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurgada
Flights: 7.15am and 4pm. Tickets: LE238 for Egyptians, LE780 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Flights: 6.45am. Tickets: LE246 for Egyptians, LE521 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Sydney power
SPARKED by an executive's criticism of the power lines moving the cables at time for the 2000 Olympic Stadium.

Tuning up
EIGHT-time Olympic champion Carl Lewis, who won the Leroy Burrell 100m title at the Sydney Olympic Club, has reached a deal with the Sydney Olympic Club to compete at an Olympic event on 18 May in Sydney.

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Tripping over travel's hurdles

The Ministry of Tourism coined 1996 "the year of quality" but obstacles remain, say those who create the backdrop of a tourist's experience. **Rehab Saad reports**

This year, Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagi wanted to see Egypt rise as a viable competitor in the world tourism market and his expectations were coupled with a plan to organise training courses for the service sector that would "enhance the professional capabilities of those working in the tourist industry" and to increase collaboration between the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Education and the Tourist Chamber Union.

But the realisation of high quality services in the tourist industry requires more than just a slogan, a business mantra or training courses, say its most loyal members. Travel agents, airline representatives and hotel managers tackle day-by-day obstacles, such as overbooking, cancellations, discrepancies in travel agency itineraries and delays in domestic flights. If those problems are surmounted, the quality of tourism in Egypt might, one day, fulfill Beltagi's ideals. In the meantime, it is the tourist who falls victim to these glitches.

"You don't have a second chance to improve the first impression" is an adage that Nagwa Emad of Sonesta hotels stands by. "Quality services start from the moment we sign the contract with the tourist," she says, "and from the minute the tourist arrives at the airport." The airport is where some problems begin.

One of the most common pitfalls of airline travel are delays: delays in peak seasons; delays during the hajj (annual pilgrimage) and the umra (off-season pilgrimage); and delays when Egyptian teachers return for holidays from their academic year in the Gulf. When all three coincide, as they did between January and March of this year, the problem reaches aggravating heights. One solution, says Abdel-Aziz Sidki of EgyptAir, is more aircraft. He says that the airline plans to purchase "six modern planes which will arrive during the next two years."

Once the tourist leaves the airport, another obstacle to a leisurely trip might come by surprise: overbooking. In general, hotels have a policy of selling more rooms than are available; a measure taken to offset cancellations. If a hotel's capacity is 120 rooms, the hotel might accept bookings for 150. If no clients cancel, then there are no rooms for the extra 30 people.

In Nagwa Emad's view, travel agencies who "block-book" for an entire year "should release any unrequired rooms from their allotment, so that we can use them." Failing that, hotels try to diminish their losses by overbooking. "And we cannot afford to make the travel agencies angry, because they are our bread and butter," says Emad.

The travel agencies have their own point of view. "This problem results from hotel miscalculations, not the travel agencies," argues Mohamed Reda of Lucky Tours. Along with hotels are the Nile cruiseboats, who also

overbook, he says. At peak seasons the tourist might be relegated to a hotel rather than a river boat. "This really annoys tourists, and they sometimes file lawsuits against us," he says.

Reda has a solution that would require "honesty and reliability" on the part of travel agencies. Foreign tour operators, he says, abide by certain rules: if the tour programme changes, the client is informed at least 35 days before arrival and the tourist is the ultimate decision-maker. If the new schedule does not suit the traveller, "then the travel agency should either cancel the trip or postpone it," says Reda.

In this vicious cycle of hotels that blame travel agencies and agencies that blame hotels, the bottom line is that the tourist suffers. "If a travel agency fools the foreign tour operator and doesn't carry out the programme as is," says Hassan El-Mufti, chairman of the board of Karnak Travel Agency, "then the tourists will not blame the travel agency. They will say that Egypt is not up to standard and the agency will not bring us tourists anymore."

When tourism was affected during the Gulf crisis and as a result of terrorist acts committed against tourists, tour operators abroad were understanding, says El-Mufti. "Now that tourism is back, we are expecting an influx of travellers. If we do not treat them in a professional way, then we will have a serious problem. One that will probably be worse than terrorism," he predicts.

What with overbookings, changes in itineraries and poor domestic flight connections, the pitfalls of "quality" service are serious and various solutions have been suggested. As travel agencies, hotels, government agencies and airlines all contribute to a tourist's experience, it is a given to some critics that "quality" will only be reached if each of these bodies works hard and coordinates their business more fully.

In the short-term, proposes El-Mufti of Karnak Travel Agency, the culprits — be they travel agencies, hotels or Nile cruises — should be punished. "By that, I mean terminate their activities."

In the long-term, he thinks Egyptian society should improve its outlook. "We do not really have any tourist education or culture. We should teach students in schools how to draw benefit from tourism," he says. "There is a vast difference between gaining benefits or making fraudulent gains from a tourist."

As international tourist destinations compete in opening their arms in wide welcome to the travellers who increase their tourist revenues, it is clear that Egypt needs more than a slogan to maintain its reputation. "Those who are not up to standard and who don't maintain quality and professionalism will not survive," says El-Mufti.

Airport threshold

Coming out of a three-month training course, Cairo airport officials and travel agents seem ready to streamline services, writes **Sherine Nasr**

Organised by the Egyptian Tourist Chamber (ETC), the course aimed to create faster and better services for travellers to Cairo and drew 1,800 tourist representatives, the tourist police, passport, airport customs and security as well as EgyptAir representatives.

"First impressions are likely to affect the rest of a tourist's journey," said Mohamed Othman, the course organiser and head of ETC Public Relations, adding that airport officials and travel agents can combine efforts and make a traveller either feel comfortable or flustered.

The course acquainted travel agents with airport security, passport and custom regulations in order to better prepare them to provide "professional services," said Othman.

The airport's deputy chief of security, Mohamed Hadyet, explained that a list of nationalities, who must register with security prior to arrival, has now been provided to travel agents for the sake of speedier service.

Travel agents are also now expected to acquaint tourists with customs regulations on electrical equipment, such as registering video cameras on passports on entry, lest they be taxed when the tourist leaves Egypt.

But tourist agents face their own set of problems, especially when dealing with airport authorities, and some of them seem to have been solved: tourist agents are now permitted to accompany a group from the moment of their arrival, before they reach the gate; groups are now allowed to check their passports through more than one immigration counter; and tourist companies have agreed with passport control to have the company logo stamped on each passport to facilitate identification, and hence movement. Speeding up luggage checks was another major travel agent request. "We made it clear that tourists come for fun and it is ridiculous to make them go through lengthy luggage checks," said Mona Eid of Green Valley Tours, adding that customs gave its employees the necessary directives.

The airport-based activities of marketing agents who try to attract tourists who have not booked a package tour was also a concern. The airport has assigned three shifts to cover working hours and only two marketing agents, representing two companies, are allowed on one shift. "The decision is designed to prevent harassment to tourists," said Hadyet, adding that marketing agents must now pass Ministry of Tourism

exams before they are appointed. Airport taxi drivers and porters are not given licences before their legal status is investigated, said Hadyet. The taxi's destination is made known to the airport police before its departure from the airport. In the event of any violation, the driver's licence is withdrawn for three months. "We have to make sure that they are not a source of annoyance," he said.

According to Othman, 3,000 taxi drivers will join another training course this month in an attempt to raise the quality of their services, by convincing them that "good services directly reflect on their income," he said.

Although the training courses seem to have solved many daily problems that hinder smooth airport procedures, some chronic deficiencies remain. Othman said the Cairo International Airport must cope with increasing numbers of tourists and that the airport is equipped with "only ten immigration counters," whereas other international airports have more.

The parking area is also distant from the airport buildings which is "all the more difficult for disabled tourists," he said, adding that airport improvements have, so far, only touched the surface.

Venturing with Greece

Egypt and Greece signed a tourist protocol to increase tourist traffic between the two countries

The Egyptian and Greek tourist industries will develop joint travel packages to attract travellers from as far afield as the US, Canada, South East Asia and Latin America, reports Rehab Saad. "There will also be an exchange of statistical information, marketing experiences and joint ventures," said Adel Abdel-Aziz, the head of the Egyptian Tourist Authority, at a press conference this week.

Abdel-Aziz added that the joint ventures mainly relate to marinas. "We shall cooperate to establish a marina

project in the Red Sea with common investments," he said.

John Stefanides, the head of the Greek Tourist Authority, who was accompanied by high-ranking Greek tourist officials, stressed that his visit and the signing of the protocol reflected the Greek government's commitment on tourist cooperation between the two countries and Greek love and respect for Egyptians. "We believe, in our country, that tourism develops and improves relations between nations. Our relations with Egypt have not been affected by the latest unfortunate incident," he said, referring to the shooting death of 18 Greek tourists in Cairo last month. "I am here today to be sure that nothing has affected our historical friendship with Egypt."

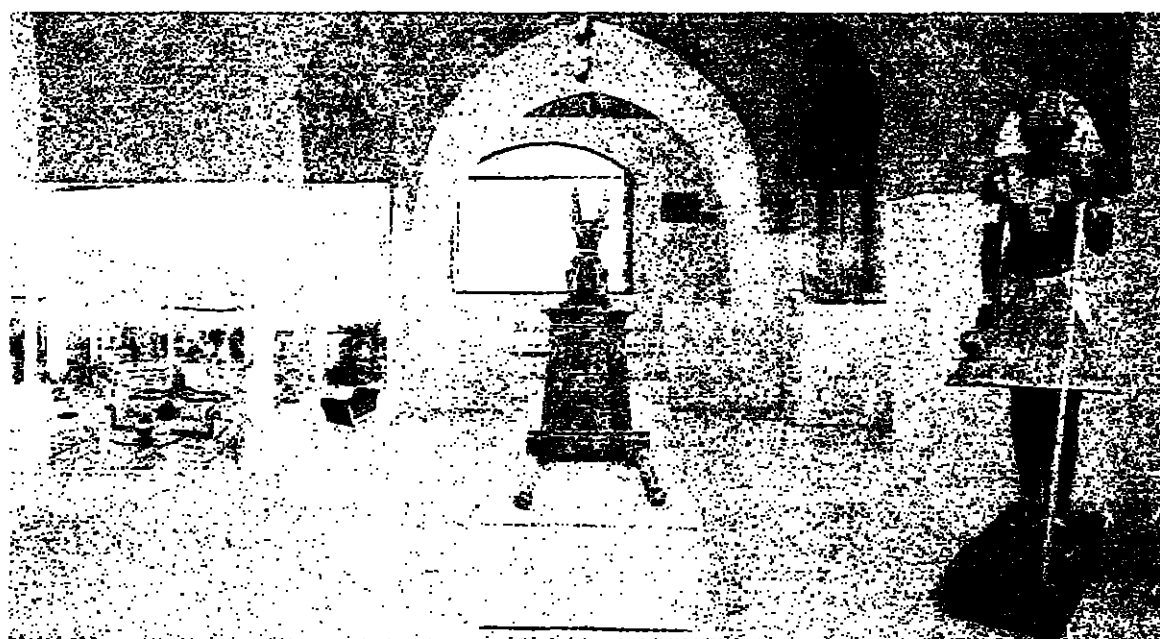
Stefanides suggested that there should be special arrangements for flights from distant countries to both Egypt and Greece. "Airlines should be reduced for those travellers who come from the US, for example, and wish to visit Egypt first, and then continue their flight to Athens. The transfer between Cairo and Athens should be at no extra cost. Although both Egyptian and Greek national airlines are independent from the ministries of tourism, we could work to convince them of the advantages of such a suggestion," he said.

Offering scholarships to both Egyptians and Greeks is an important factor to promote cooperation between the two countries, Stefanides said. "We have ten institutes of tourism in Greece where 2,000 students receive education. We wish to invite a number of Egyptian students to come and train in tourism," he said.

Asked what effect the shooting incident had on the number of visitors to Egypt, Stefanides said that Greeks are sceptical these days due to continuous news coverage on Greek and cable TV. Greek travel agencies, however, are still actively promoting and encouraging people to visit Egypt. "We, as a governmental tourist promotion authority, are trying to remove any negative impacts," Stefanides stressed. "Before I came here, I met some Greek shipping magnates who come to Egypt on a weekly basis. All said they would continue sailing at their usual schedules."

According to the head of the Greek Tourist Authority, about 45,000 Greeks visited Egypt in 1995 and this number is expected to reach 100,000 next year. Greece receives about 10 million tourists annually: from Germany, Britain, Italy and France. The Greek tourist income ranges between \$6 and \$7 billion, said Stefanides.

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Getting ready at Giza

SERIOUS preparations are underway at the Giza Pyramids, where the first Al-Ahram International Squash Championship will be taking place from 15-22 May. Tomorrow, the glass court will arrive from London, where it was specially manufactured for this prestigious event at a cost of 100,000 pounds sterling. It will be erected at the site on Saturday. Fifty-six players are to participate in the competition, which will be the world's second largest international squash event, with prize money amounting to \$100,000. The world's 22 highest-seeded players, including Pakistan's world champion Jansher Khan, are taking part, and players' performance in this competition will go towards their future world rankings.

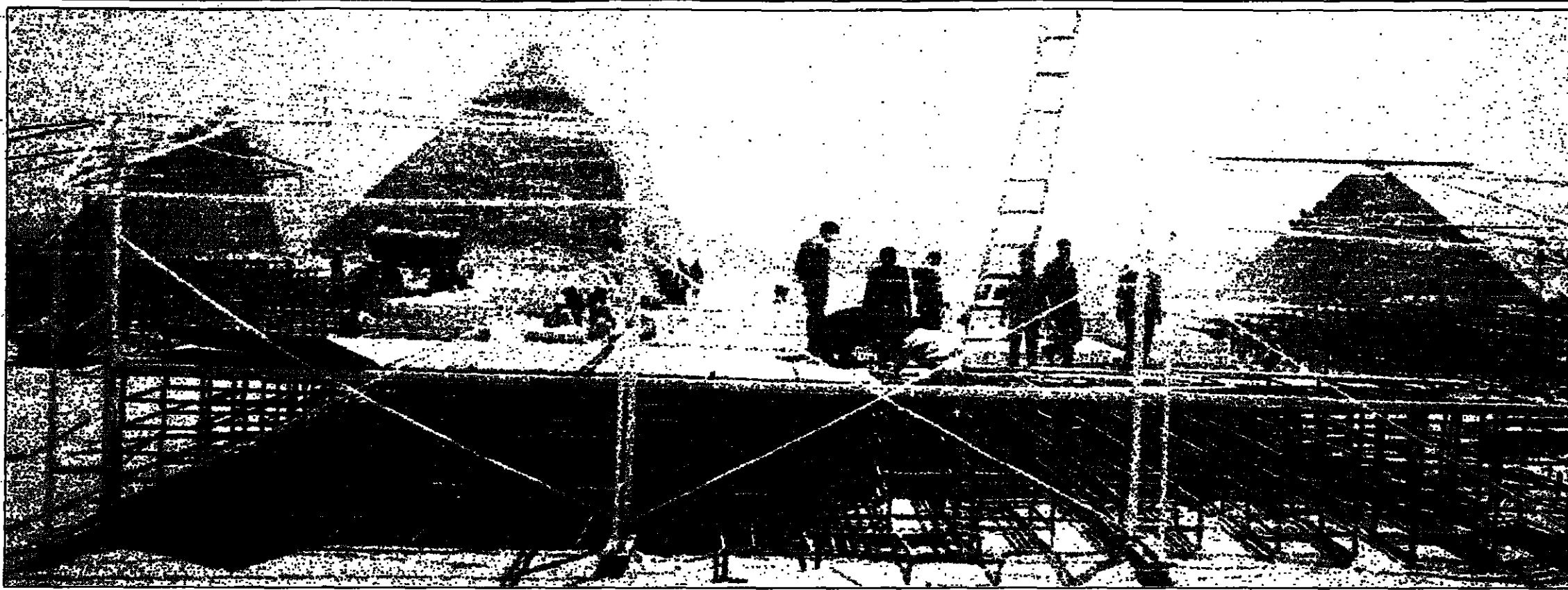


photo: Osama Abdel Nabil

Volleyball's silver lining

The national volleyball team returned from the Emirates' Rashed International Championship with the silver medal

Second place may not seem much of a cause for celebration for a national team. But in the face of fierce competition, and the fact that Egyptian volleyball captain Foad Abdel-Salam had requested permission to withdraw from the Rashed International Championship on the grounds that many new members had insufficient experience, then the team's satisfaction with the silver medal is more understandable, writes Abeer Anwar.

Four countries joined Egypt in the Emirates for the championship, which took place from 12-19 April: Pakistan, India (ranked fifth in the last World Championship), Lebanon and the Emirates.

In view of the Egyptian football team's massive defeat in the Emirates' International Football Championship back in March, the volleyball team travelled to the Gulf knowing they had something to prove. Clearly the Egyptian expatriate community had little faith in the team. "No one came to watch. Even the Egyptian ambassador did not attend the matches until we promised him that we would win a respectable place and do something to improve Egypt's sporting image," said Mohamed Fathi, one of the team's more experienced players.

The competition was played as a round robin. Egypt's first match was against Pakistan, where the national team came from behind to snatch victory after a three-hour struggle. "We lost the first and second set, but then we woke up and took the next three sets to win the match 3-2," said Abdel-Salam. The following day, the team suffered a disappointing 0-3 defeat at the hands of

India, after a two-hour match, a loss they put down to exhaustion following their marathon win with Pakistan.

However the team was able to bounce back to beat Lebanon 3-1 before facing what had been predicted to be their biggest challenge — the Emirates, playing on their home ground. Egypt knew that loss to the Emirates would relegate them to fourth place — a scenario they were unwilling to face. In the event, the Emirates failed to win a single set. The Egyptian team's 3-0 victory put them in second place behind India, the champions, with Pakistan in third.

The Egyptian team returned not only with the silver medal but with two cups. Emad Nasr, the national team's captain, won the title of best server, Mohamed Fathi, the prize for best receiver.

Both coach Abdel-Salam and technical expert Pitters Carmelo expressed their satisfaction at the team's achievement against the odds. "Winning second place in an event like this, at a time when there are lots of new faces in the team, is a great achievement, especially as the Indian team are so strong, with very tall players," commented Carmelo.

The Emirates Volleyball Federation has decided to make the championship an annual event, both to give the Emirates a place in the international volleyball scene and to promote the game within the country itself. And, with large sums offered as prize money — including 1,000 dirhams for the best player in each match — the championship is sure to prove a draw to many different countries in the future.

Serve, spike, retire

At 28, Azza Taha has decided to retire from the world of volleyball. As her fans and teammates question why, Abeer Anwar investigates

"One day, you will be a famous volleyball player", a physical education instructor told nine-year-old Azza Taha. These words, uttered 19 years ago to a girl who then had no more than a casual interest in volleyball, helped propel Taha into a sport that would win her a gold medal in the 1986 Nairobi All Africa Games and a silver medal in the 1991 All Africa Games.

She also served as the women's national volleyball team captain and assisted the team in securing the gold in two Arab Championships, the first in 1991 and the second in 1995. In addition, the team, under her leadership, won first place in the African District Qualifications in Kenya in 1995 and for the first time since 1980, qualified for the 1995 World Cup.

Beside her teacher's words of inspiration, Taha attributes her success to her passion for the sport. She played on her Port Said school's volleyball team, and travelled for the first time in her life to Cairo with the team. She went on to play in the Port Said Club's team until 1985 when she was recruited into the ranks of the national team. From there, she practiced in the Zamalek Club in order to be closer to her teammates. "Because of my love for the sport, I left my city and my family," Taha recalled.

For Taha, this was not an easy price to pay for her success, and would ultimately come back to haunt her and, to the dismay of many in the athletic community, lead to her early retirement. Taha recently announced



Azza Taha with her daughter Hadir

that she will no longer compete on the international circuit, and will play only in domestic competitions. While this may be a surprise to many of her fans, her reasons, at least in her mind, are clear.

The first factor which led to her decision to retire was a fundamental disillusionment with the Egyptian Volleyball Federation's somewhat lackadaisical attitude toward the national team. This feeling of disillusionment was heightened by the Olympic Committee's decision to ban the team from participating in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.

The second reason strikes more at the heart than the career. As a wife and a mother, Taha was saddened by the fact that she had to spend so much time away from her family. "Although I used to take Hadir, my daughter, with me to every training camp, whether it was in or outside Egypt, I felt that I didn't have enough time to sit down and discuss things with her," she said. "For seven years I have been able to strike a balance between volleyball and my personal life, and I've been the only player able to do so. But now, it's just not enough."

With the decision to retire firmly entrenched in her mind, Taha played her final match in the Zamalek Club last week. The match was between Zamalek's team and the national team. She retired on her birthday. "I chose this day so that I would have a life-long reminder of the sport. It will also help cheer me up when I think about having left the sport," said Taha.



El-Sawi serving an ace easily

photo: Amr Gamal

Davis Cup walkover

Egypt's tennis players had an easy start in the Davis Cup European-African Zone Group II at the Gezira Club. **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** attended

Egypt's tennis team is fully primed for Davis Cup action this year, determined to succeed where they failed last year, and make it into Davis Cup Group I. Some, like Tamer El-Sawi or Hisham Hemeida, have been preparing by competing in the US; others, like Amr Ghoneim, have been taking part in satellite tournaments here in Egypt.

Last year, the team, led by Tamer El-Sawi, Hisham Hemeida and Amr Ghoneim, almost made it past the preliminaries into Group I, but were knocked out 1-4 by the Ukraine in the semi-finals of the qualifications. The Ukraine's Andrei Medvedev, ranked 17, soundly defeated El-Sawi in the last singles match, shattering Egypt's hopes for the competition.

In the first round this year, Egypt faced little that amounted to a real challenge, with a 5-0 clean sweep against the ex-Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia, in Cairo's Gezira Club.

In the first match, Egypt's Amr Ghoneim had an easy victory over Ogen Nikolovski — 6-0 6-2 6-3. Tamer El-Sawi played the second match against Lazar Magdaniv, another straight sets victory (6-2 6-3 6-0). El-Sawi, now ranked 200, seemed to exert minimum effort, as if he was saving his strength for a more deserving case. In the doubles match, the harmonious Egyptian pair, Tamer El-Sawi and Hisham Hemeida beat Macedonia's Ogen Nikolovski and Dragon Jovanovski 6-4 6-1 6-2 in another walkover. Egyptian victory was now assured — the team had won three out of a total of five matches. The final reverse singles matches were played over only three sets. Hemeida beat Nikolovski 4-6, 6-2, 6-0 in the fourth match, Nikolovski winning Macedonia's only set. In the fifth and final match, Ghoneim beat Magdaniv 6-2, 6-1.

So, without facing any real challenge, Egypt is through to the second round of the Group II qualifications, and will meet the winners of the contest between Core d'Ivoire and Latvia in Egypt from 1-3 July.

The Egyptian Tennis Federation are thinking of holding the second round in Mansoura. The town has a good tennis stadium; the locals enjoy a good game of tennis; and it would be in keeping with the Egyptian Tennis Federation's policy of promoting tennis in the provinces. By coincidence Mansoura club is called Gezira as well — Gezirat El-Ward (Island of Flowers).

Olympics countdown

Tuning up

EIGHT-times Olympic champion Carl Lewis, world record holder Leroy Burrell, reigning Olympic champion Michael Marsh and others from the Santa Monica Track Club have reached a deal to compete at an Olympic tuneup meeting on 18 May in Atlanta.

The deal will also bring Johnny Gray, Lamont Smith and Miller Christian Cushing-Murray to the Olympic Stadium event.

Sydney powerlines

SPARKED by an American executive's criticism of Sydney's unsightly power lines, the city is moving the cables underground in time for the 2000 Olympics.

Five kilometres of overhead power lines and their massive steel-framed towers will be removed at a cost of about \$32 million.

World Cup battlefield

Nine months ago FIFA, the world football body, announced that it was delaying its decision on who would host the 2002 World Cup. It was hoped that the intervening period would see an end to the seemingly acrimonious between the two potential hosts, South Korea and Japan.

But this course could open another can of worms. The proposal runs counter to FIFA's charter, which states that the World Cup should be hosted by one nation. To allow South Korea and Japan to play joint hosts would require a meeting of FIFA's congress to change the body's charter.

Such an operation would be a litmus test for President Joao Havelange's leadership of FIFA. Havelange is currently embroiled in a power struggle with the president of European football's governing body, UEFA, Lennart Johansson over UEFA's documents, *Vision One* and *Two*, in which UEFA lay the groundwork for a new order in world football. The documents propose that FIFA's committee system should be reorganised democratically, and that FIFA should subsidise football's worldwide development from profits gained from selling World

Cup television rights. If the co-hosting proposal gets as far as a FIFA congress, that congress could be seen as a vote of confidence for Havelange.

According to Viken Djizmedjian of the Confederation of African Football (CAF), the African football body may support the co-hosting proposal. Meanwhile, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) is solidly behind the scheme. AFC President Sultan Ahmed Shah expressed his concern that the campaign had got way out of hand in a letter to FIFA and the heads of the four continental federations. He argued that the situation was unhealthy for FIFA, the AFC, for the future of the World Cup and of the game itself. "It is our duty to take control of the situation so that the smity and morality of football are maintained at all times," he wrote.

So far there has been no official comment from either of the warring camps, but Ken Nagamura, deputy chairman of the World Cup Japan 2002 Bidding Committee, in Cairo for a seminar organised

by CAF in co-operation with Japan 2002 in April, said that FIFA's rules for selecting World Cup hosts clearly required that the event should be hosted by a single nation. "We abide by this and I think FIFA should too. But if FIFA decides to alter its stand, we have to respect it because its decision is final."

The co-hosting idea was first mooted in both Japan and South Korea as early as last July, but the scheme caused a public outcry in South Korea, where memories of Japan's record in World War II remain very much alive. FIFA's South Korean vice-president, Chung Mong-Joon, who is a supporter of the UEFA *Vision* documents and a critic of Havelange, is thought by observers to be making moves towards an alliance with UEFA in order to give South Korea a better chance. While some approve his actions, others feel that alienating FIFA's president would not, on the face of it, seem a good tactical move for the South Koreans.

Japan and South Korea both have good

With less than a month left for FIFA to announce the 2002 World Cup host, there is no sign of an end to hostilities between the two would-be hosts, Japan and South Korea, writes **Eric Asomugha**

records in hosting major international sports events, and are technologically more than able to cope with an event like the World Cup. Both have hosted the Olympic Games and various world class championships in the past. As far as football goes, South Korea has qualified for the World Cup finals on a few occasions; Japan has not. But on the other hand, Japan is ahead of South Korea in FIFA's football ranking released on 1 May. Japan moved three steps forward, from its previous position of 31, to 29. South Korea moved 13 places back, from 46 to 59.

Whatever the pros and cons, one thing is certain. It is decision time for FIFA, which has until 1 June to announce the location of World Cup 2002. Lovers of football the world over await its decision, and hope that somehow a way is found to ensure that the World Cup, football's biggest and best event, does not become a battlefield.

Edited by Inas Mazhar



For a gentleman among gentlemen with a taste for social justice, reconciling a passion for acting with a penchant for political commitment is easy

Eleven masters of Greek print making



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